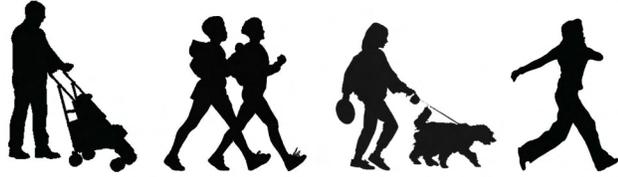


2014

Comprehensive



# Parks and Recreation

Master Plan

# Burke County

NORTH CAROLINA







---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION 1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
	1.1 Introduction
	1.2 Purposes and Goals
	1.3 Acknowledgements
<b>SECTION 2</b>	<b>POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS</b>
	2.1 Demographic Profile
	2.2 Population Projection
	2.3 Population Trends
<b>SECTION 3</b>	<b>EXISTING PARK FACILITIES</b>
	3.1 Introduction
	3.2 Existing Park Facilities
	3.3 General Recreation Programming
<b>SECTION 4</b>	<b>RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>
	4.1 Introduction
	4.2 Public Input Needs Assessment
	4.3 State and National Assessments
	4.4 Types of Parks and Recreation Facilities
	4.5 Evaluation of Park Land Needs
	4.6 Evaluation of Facility Needs
<b>SECTION 5</b>	<b>GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
	5.1 Introduction
	5.2 Roles of Burke County
	5.3 Roles of Other Recreation Providers
	5.4 Park Proposals and Recommendations
	5.5 Existing Facility Proposals/Recommendations
	5.6 Priorities for Development
<b>SECTION 6</b>	<b>ECO/ADVENTURE TOURISM ASSETS AND CONSIDERATIONS</b>
	6.1 Introduction
	6.2 Travel Industry Experts
	6.3 What is Ecotourism?
	6.4 What is Sustainable Tourism?
	6.5 Adventure Travel
	6.6 Local Partners
	6.7 Burke County's Future

## **SECTION 7 ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Economic Development Initiative
- 7.3 Opportunities and Strategies
- 7.4 Plan Adoption
- 7.5 Conclusions

## **APPENDICES**

This online version of the Master Plan does not contain appendices



## SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION



Burke County is located in the western portion of North Carolina and is bordered by McDowell County to the west, Caldwell County to the northeast, Catawba County to the east, and Rutherford and Cleveland Counties to the south. Burke County was formed in 1777 when it broke off from Rowan County. Originally, Burke County included all of the territory now occupied by Alexander, Buncombe, Caldwell, Haywood, Lincoln, McDowell, Madison, Mitchell, Swain, Watauga, and Yancy

counties. Burke County was named for Thomas Burke, an Irish settler who later became the third governor of the state of North Carolina (1781-1782). The settlers of Burke County were largely Scottish, Irish, English, and Moravian, coming from Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the eastern part of the Carolinas. Immigrants from the Waldesian Valley of the Italian Alps also settled in the eastern part of the county.

The development of the county was initially spurred by the construction of the Norfolk-Southern Railroad in the 1880s. The railroad encouraged the development of industry and various small towns and villages along its length. The Pisgah National Forest extends into the northwest section of the county. The county also contains the Catawba River, Rhodhiss Lake, and Lake James. Overall, the topography of the county is rugged with more level areas in the central section. The topography of central Burke County is shaped by the Piedmont Plateau, in the northern part of county the landforms are shaped by the Appalachian Mountain Region, and the southern part of the county they are a result of the

*Morganton is County Seat*



formation of the South Mountains. The major interstate highway in Burke County is I-40, which runs east-west. Other major roads in the county include U.S. 70, U.S. 64, N.C. 181, and N.C. 18. Major cities within Burke County include Morganton, the largest municipality and county seat, Glen Alpine, Drexel, Valdese, Rutherford College, Connelly Springs, and Hildebran; and portions of Rhodhiss, Hickory, and Longview.



The total land area of the County is 505 square miles. The population according to the 1990 US Census was 75,744 and the estimated 1998 population was 84,136 (North Carolina Office of State Planning). The 8-year increase in population of 8,392 identified an annual population growth rate of 1.32%. Slowed growth rates occurred during the “economic recession” of 2008-2012 leaving the number of estimated residents at 90,505 in 2012. The current population (2014) is estimated to be at 90,723. Regardless of the population estimates used to project the future growth of Burke County, good planning practices will help to maintain the high quality of life enjoyed by today’s and tomorrow’s residents. An official Recreation Master Plan will help Burke County make proper decisions to meet existing recreation needs and provide for development of facilities for the future.

## 1.2 PURPOSES AND GOALS

Burke County provides public recreation to its citizens as a means of supporting a high quality of life. Studies have shown that ‘quality of life’ issues are very important to residents and visitors and lively programs and events can have a major impact on community economic development as well.



The County recognizes the importance of *planning* as a means of improving recreation opportunities for all its residents and visitors. As a result, the Burke County Board of County Commissioners appointed a Steering Committee on December 20, 2013 for the creation of a review and update of the system-wide Comprehensive Master Plan – to include all existing and future park facilities and grounds – and to address greenways, which are planned for the future. Subsequently, McGill Associates, P.A., was hired as the site and master plan consultants.



STATE SCHOOL FOR DEAF AND DUMB—MORGANTON.

The Updated Burke County Comprehensive Master Plan 2014-2034 provides the framework for guiding The County Board of Commissioners and Staff in both its current evaluation of- and long-range planning for the parks and recreation system for Burke County. The framework for this Master Plan is based upon conducting a review and inventory of the existing park



system and recording the observations. The assessment of these facilities, or lack of facilities, will identify the immediate facility needs in the community and predict the future needs of residents.

Another purpose of the Master Plan is to recommend the addition or renovation of parks, programs, and recreational facilities. Not only does the Master Plan include recommendations, but it also prioritizes specific projects, such as recommended park upgrades, expansion and land acquisition, taking into consideration the identification of user population and the development of recreation standards. This Master Plan is action-oriented and will provide Burke County with a practical guide for its enhancement of its facilities and programs for the next ten years. This guide also sets the stage for future development of alternative recreation opportunities based on sustainable “eco-tourism” and “adventure-based tourism”. The County has vast recreational resources in the Pisgah National Forest, State Parks, and other culturally significant assets that could serve as generators of future economic growth.

In preparing the Comprehensive Master Plan, McGill Associates, P.A., worked with Burke County Staff and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee.

A key objective in the development of the Comprehensive Master Plan was the solicitation of community input, thereby identifying additional needs for Burke County, such as renovation, construction, land purchase, development and operational policies, for both now and in the future. Community input, along with the comparison to state and national standards are the initial steps in the Master Plan process.



*State and National Parks and Recreation Standards* were used as a guide to support the recommendations made for the parks and recreation facilities for Burke County. Using these standard guidelines, McGill Associates, P.A., developed a plan, which applied specifically to the resident and non-resident users of parks and recreational facilities.

The Comprehensive Master Plan emphasizes the potential for ‘connectivity’ of proposed projects and existing sites, such as parks, recreational facilities, schools and other government-owned properties. It is not designed to be exclusive, but rather to enhance recreational opportunities in the community.

Of utmost intent, the Comprehensive Master Plan is intended to maintain the type of venue in Burke County that fosters community spirit, activism, and bonding between local citizens.



The study of the demographic profile of County residents' population and ages, as related to areas of larger or smaller population, is a key factor in making specific and accurate recommendations.

Not only does Burke County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan make recommendations for a twenty-year period of time (2014-2034), but it also suggests the means by which the identified objectives might be achieved. Opportunities for grants, partnerships, and outside funding are recommended as aids in the establishment of a Capital Improvement Plan and an operating budget.

The Master Plan focuses on providing Burke County with an accurate, usable guide for decision-making as the County begins to implement projects, such as:



- Developing new recreational facilities on recently acquired land on Lake James.
- Developing facilities and programming for future parks and greenways.
- Managing athletic programming challenges related to the possible closing of and consolidation of public school properties.
- Considering strategies to capture the market for sustainable eco/adventure-tourism.

The Comprehensive Master Plan is divided into seven major component sections, which are listed below:

- Section 1 - Introduction
- Section 2 – Population Trends and Projections
- Section 3 – Existing Park Facilities
- Section 4 – Recreation Needs Assessment
- Section 5 – Goals and Recommendations
- Section 6 – Ecotourism and the Burke County Recreation Master Plan
- Section 7 – Implementation Plan

### 1.3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Burke County wishes to express its sincere appreciation for those entities and individuals, who, in any way, contributed to the creation of the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan, some of which are identified below. Without the





knowledge and expertise of these persons, in both individual- and team settings, this document would not be possible.

**Burke County Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2014-2024)**  
**Steering Committee**

Gary Craig  
Amy Swanson  
Maynard Taylor  
Kevin Reese  
Lee Kiser  
Joey Mull  
Tyler Roach  
Sarah Dergins  
Scott Carpenter

**Burke County Planning Board**

Ed Hallyburton, Chariman  
Joyce M. Counihan, Vice Chairperson  
Rick McClurd  
Russell E. Bridges  
Margaret S. Coffin  
Bakhtiar S. Alam  
Richard Owensby

**Burke County Board of Commisioners**

Johnnie Carswell (Chairman)  
Maynard M. Taylor (Vice Chairman)  
Wayne F. Abele Sr. (Commissioner)  
Jeffrey C. Brittain, P.E. (Commissioner)  
Jack Carroll (Commissioner)  
Kay Honeycutt Draughn (Clerk to the Board)

**Burke County Staff**

Bryan Steen, County Manager  
Scott Carpenter, Deputy County Manager

**Consultant**





McGill Associates, P.A.  
1240 19<sup>th</sup> Street Lane, NW  
Hickory, North Carolina 28601  
(828) 328-2024

**- END OF SECTION -**



## **SECTION 2 POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS**

### **2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**



A review of the demographic information of Burke County has been evaluated to better understand the characteristics of the community and to identify future trends and projections that may influence recreation and park planning. Information concerning the age and gender of the population is an important factor in determining the needs for recreation in the community. Statistics from the US Census Bureau and Burke County indicate that there will be a period of strong growth in the County over the next few years. The table below contains the general demographic characteristics for full-time residents of Burke County as ascertained by the 2008-2012 American Community Survey census estimates.



CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
<b>SEX</b>		
Male	45,525	50.1
Female	45,296	49.9
Total:	90,821	100.0
<b>AGE</b>		
Under 10 years	10,348	11.4
10 to 19 years	12,781	14.1
20 to 24 years	5,445	6.0
25 to 34 years	9,581	10.5
35 to 44 years	12,277	13.5
45 to 54 years	13,501	14.9
55 to 64 years	12,219	13.5
65 to 74 years	8,324	9.2
75 to 84 years	4,562	5.0
85 years and over	1,783	2.0
Total:	90,821	100.0
<b>RACE</b>		
White	75,258	82.8
Black	5,973	6.6
American Indian/Alaskan	227	0.2
Asian	3,004	3.3
Hispanic	4,758	5.2
Some other race	80	0.1
Two or more races	1,521	1.7
Total:	90,821	100.0

Source: American FactFinder, ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008-2012

The 2008-2012 population estimates from the US Census Bureau reveal significant characteristics of Burke County's population. The largest age population division is the 45 to 54 year old group, followed by the 10-19 year age group. It is important to note that all of the members of the 45 to 64 year old group will be in the senior category by the end of this 10 year plan. A large majority of the population is white, while about



6.6% are of African descent. A growing segment of the population, 5.2%, is people of Hispanic ancestry.

## 2.2 POPULATION PROJECTIONS



A review of the demographic information of Burke County has been evaluated to better understand the characteristics of the county and to identify future trends and projections that may influence recreation and park planning. Information concerning age and gender are important factors in determining the needs for recreation in the community. The table (below) contains the *general* demographic characteristics for full-time residents of Burke County as a whole as ascertained by the Federal Census

2010 and the NC Dept. of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division, 2014).

There has been no significant increase in Burke County’s population for the last couple years. Using current growth rates for the County (2010-2020), growth for Burke County has been projected as seen in Table 2.2-1.

**Table 2.2-1 Burke County Population Projections**

Year	Burke County population
2010	90,774
2011	90,861
2012	90,505
2014	90,723
2017	90,905
2024	92,730



Population decreases (rate of .4%) since 2011-2012 were most likely due to the downsizing of the U.S. economy and corresponding job losses and re-locations of workers associated with the poor economy. However, the population showed significant growth (approx. 1.32%) prior to the downward trend in part due to Burke County's geographic proximity to the Piedmont, Charlotte, and Triad areas that typically grow despite of the economy.



The population of Burke County at the time of this study (2014) is estimated to be approximately 90,723 (NC Dept. of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division, 2014). Analysis by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division indicates an expected growth rate of just .2% is through 2017. This is a conservative rate of growth pending any unforeseen future calamities. The 2017 Burke County population is predicted to be 90,905 residents (NC Dept. of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division, 2014). Using the .2% growth trend

would take the expected population to 92,730 by 2024. Due to the economic uncertainties that face our Nation today, Burke County population estimates from 2024 leading to 2034 may not yield accurate enough data to benefit this study. The population and growth rates of the County should be re-evaluated in 2024 and adjustments should be made to Plan recommendations as necessary.

## 2.3 POPULATION TRENDS

According to the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2009-2013 (SCORP) children and senior citizens comprise two of the fastest growing groups in North Carolina who need more recreation opportunities. As the number of families with children increase in Burke County, special consideration for programming and facility needs should be re-evaluated on an annual basis. Because households with children also tend to engage more in activities such as



*Burke County is perfect setting for rugged, outdoor sports and a variety of activities.*

camping, hiking, organized sports, skateboarding, motorized sports, etc. facilities that can accommodate these types of active recreation should become increasingly popular.

Seniors, aged 55 and above report being more likely to engage in passive activities such as walking for pleasure, camping, nature study or fishing. This senior population is expected to have significant impacts throughout society because of income levels, expanding population numbers and their unique recreation needs.



Developing trends are impacting the need for additional recreation services for town residents. To attract and meet the needs of residents and visitors, the County will have

to continually evaluate its recreation and ancillary facilities and offer an expanding selection of recreation opportunities. Facilities that can accommodate multiple activities as opposed to those that offer only specific activities will be able to more efficiently meet the varied recreation demands of the public.

**-END OF SECTION-**



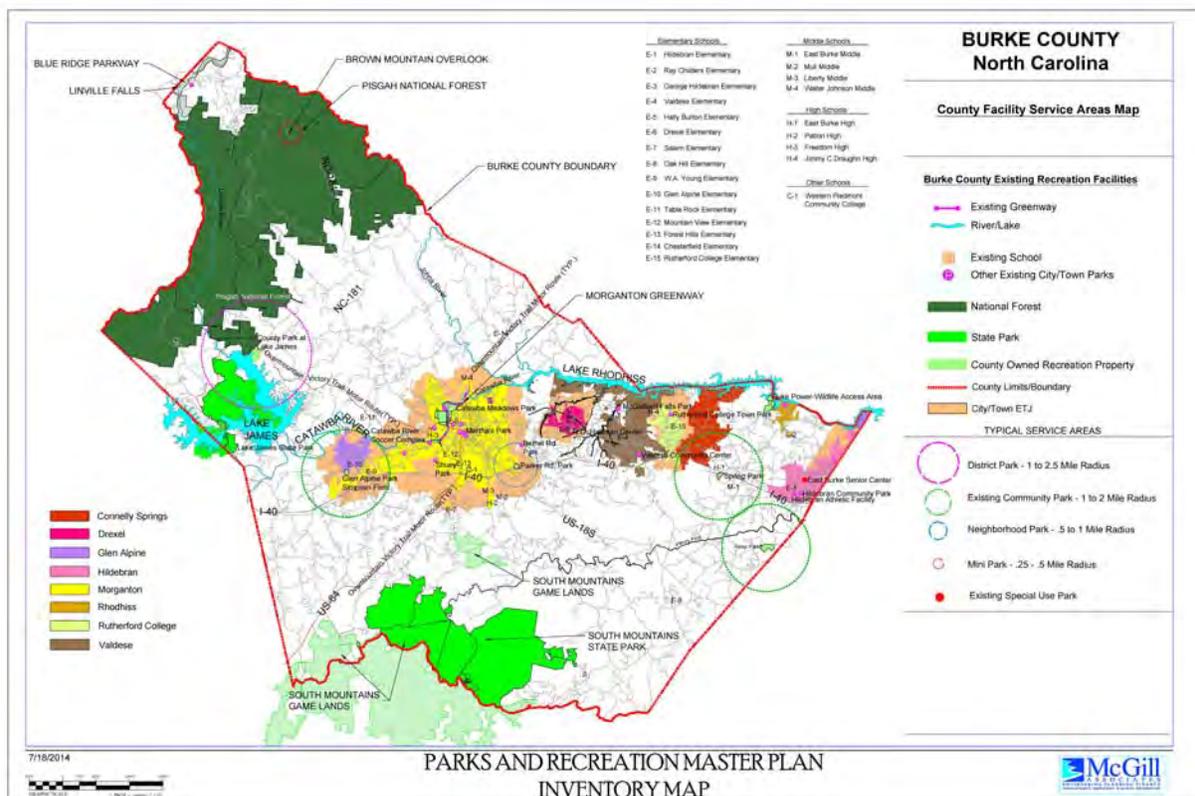


## SECTION 3

## EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

A brief analysis of Burke County recreation facilities was performed, noting any visible improvements needed for that facility. This method of study served as a guide for the Burke County in its efforts to develop a plan for present and future needs. A map showing the location of County Parks, State and Federally owned land used for recreation, as well as most of the local municipal recreation locations including County Schools can be seen below.



See a larger version of this map in the Appendix.



## 3.2 EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

### Park Facilities Owned and Operated by Burke County

#### **Reep Park (Approximately 100.6 acres)**

Facilities include:

- (4) baseball/softball fields,
- football/soccer field,
- football/soccer practice field,
- concession/restroom building,
- Playground area (fenced),
- covered picnic shelter,
- 3,400 LF of walking trail



#### **Spring Park (Approximately 32 acres)**

Facilities include:

- (1) Baseball/Softball/Soccer field,
- (1) Baseball/Softball field,
- Wildlife observation deck,
- 1,800 LF of walking trail,
- Amphitheatre,
- Concession stand,
- Restrooms,
- Covered picnic shelter
- Playground

#### **Simpson Park (Approximately 22 acres)**

This facility in Glen Alpine is controlled by Burke County Parks and Recreation.

Facilities include:

- Playground,
- Basketball court,
- (2) Little League baseball fields (lighted),
- 2,100 LF of Hiking trail,
- Amphitheatre,
- Concession stand,
- Restrooms, & covered picnic shelter,
- Football/Soccer field (not lighted)





## Parker Road Park (Approximately 14 acres)

This County facility is located in Morganton on Parker Road next to the Burke County Department of Human Resources. The park offers:



- Large group picnic shelters (w/12 tables, 3 grills),
- Restroom building,
- Small pond/lake,
- Walking trail w/benches,
- Play equipment,
- Horseshoe pits,
- Uncovered picnic tables (3)
- Basketball Court,
- 2,500 LF Walking Trail.

## Brown Mountain Overlook (0.5 acres)

Located 20 miles north of Morganton on NC Highway 181, one (1) mile south of the Barkhouse Picnic Area. This area provides parking and educational signage about the mysterious "Brown Mountain Lights", which some visitors claim to have seen on occasion.

## County Park at Lake James

Burke County was recently granted approximately 141 acres of land on Lake James for use as a future County Park. Master planning and programming of this piece of property has yet to be undertaken but because of its location and proximity to Lake James State Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, NC 181, the Linville River, Pisgah National Forest, Game Lands, the Catawba River and the City of Morganton; it is ideally situated to become a hub for a number of other recreation destinations within Burke County.

This property has the potential to become the center for future eco/adventure tourism efforts undertaken by the County. Both public and private recreation opportunities could be promoted at a County Eco/Adventure Visitor's Center located on this property.

The future Lake James Loop Trail will connect this property to the greater Lake James State Park and community with access connector trails leading to other destinations.



## Old Burke County Courthouse

Located in the center of Morganton this historic facility provides open space and seating areas in downtown Morganton. The site has a museum and also space for special events like movies in the summer.

## Rhodhiss Access Area Park (Duke Power – Wildlife Access)

Facilities include:

- Parking for trucks/trailers,
- Boat launch/landing,
- Shore fishing area

## East Burke Senior Center

The East Burke Senior Center offers a variety of classes, programs and activities to the seniors of Burke County and surrounding areas. The following are some of the programs, and activities offered: fitness room, social activities, and educational/informative events, health checks, dances, computer classes, etc.



## George Hildebrand Athletic Facilities

This facility offers:

- Gym,
- (2) Baseball/Softball fields

These facilities are adjacent to the George Hildebrand Elementary School and are used by its students and the George Hildebrand Recreation Foundation.

## Mull Athletic Facilities

This facility offers:

- (3) Baseball/Softball fields,
- Restroom/Concession building,
- (1) Soccer/Football field
- Playground

These facilities, which are adjacent to the school, are used by the Mull Athletic Foundation.





## Foothills Higher Education Center and Conference Center



Located at 2128 S. Sterling St Morganton, N.C. - This facility offers a community conference space for rent.

*Foothills Higher Education Center and Conference Center*

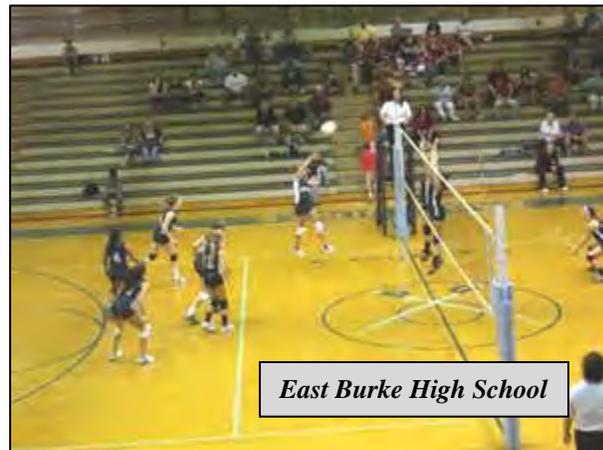
## Other public recreation facilities provided at public schools within Burke County

### **East Burke High School**

Facilities include: basketball gym and an auxiliary gym

### **East Burke Middle School**

Facilities include: basketball gym and a baseball field



*East Burke High School*



*Freedom High School*

### **Freedom High School**

Facilities include: basketball gym and a baseball field

### **W. A. Young Elementary**

Facilities include: A baseball field, football field and soccer field, and a playground.

### **Patton High School**

Facilities include: football/soccer field



*Liberty Middle School*

### **Liberty Middle School**

Facilities include: basketball gym and two (2) multi-purpose fields

### **Table Rock Middle School**

Facilities include: basketball gym

Burke County Parks and Recreation programming relies on athletic facilities not controlled/owned by the Department. The number of gyms for indoor soccer and basketball teams participating in County operated programs is approximately (15) fifteen. The number of baseball/softball and football fields is approximately (13) thirteen. These athletic team-sport programs are in high demand and continue to grow in popularity.

## **Parks Owned and Operated by Other Government Entities**

### **Town of Hildebran**

#### **Hildebran Community Park**



*Hildebran Community Park*

In 2012, The Town of Hildebran opened the Hildebran Community Park. This park offers a restored railroad station depot as a family and/or community gathering space (for rent). The park offers a large picnic pavilion with modern restrooms, a walking trail, fitness stations, disk golf course, two playgrounds, and a bocce ball court.



#### **Hildebran Athletic Facility**

This facility offers a gym & ball fields which are located behind the adjacent school property. Facilities include rest rooms, concession stand, & parking. These facilities are used by the East Burke Youth Athletic Organization.



## **Town of Drexel**

### **R. O. Huffman Center**

These facilities are used by the Drexel Booster Club for youth athletic programs. Facilities include ball field, rest rooms, concession stands, picnic shelter, tennis courts, gym, banquet room, meeting rooms, kitchen, activity room, parking, playground, etc.



*R.O. Huffman Center*

## **Town of Glen Alpine**



*Glen Alpine fields*

The Glen Alpine gym facility is located in the back of the adjacent school property. To get to the ball fields, visitors should go back to Highway 70 & continue west for 0.2 mi. At the first BP Gas station, turn left, and then proceed 0.8 mi. There will be three (3) ball fields, rest rooms, concession stand, and parking on the right. These facilities are operated by Burke County.

### **Oak Hill Athletic Facilities**

The gym and ball field are located behind the adjacent school property. Facilities include rest rooms, parking, and concession stand. These facilities are used by the Oak Hill Athletic Association.

### **Salem Athletic Facilities**

The gym and ball field are located next to the adjacent school. This facility includes a concession stand, parking, & rest rooms. These facilities are used by the Salem Athletic Foundation.

## **Town of Rutherford College**

### **Rutherford College Municipal Park**

The Rutherford College Park is located at 950 Malcolm Boulevard. A lighted picnic shelter is provided that houses nine (9) wooden tables and two (2) restrooms. The park also has a stage for entertainment, and a playground area for the children.



*Rutherford College Park*



## **Town of Valdese**

The Valdese Recreation Department offers a wide range of facilities and activities to the citizens of Valdese and the surrounding area. The department sponsors a number of special classes and activities for youth and adults. The recreation department oversees five facilities: Valdese Community Center, McGalliard Falls Park, Children's Park, Fletcher Ballpark, and Tiger Gym.

### **Valdese Community Center**

The Recreation Department is located within the Valdese Community Center, which also houses bowling lanes, a game room, snack bar and grill, fitness center, locker rooms, gymnasium, and staff offices. Also located on the grounds are two lighted tennis courts, and a year-round swimming pool.



*James C. Draughn Aquatics and Fitness Center*

Tiger Gym, behind the Old Rock School, is used for basketball and Futsal (Indoor Soccer). Also located at the gym complex is a lighted walking track and football field used by the Recreation Department teams.

The Valdese Community Center Gymnasium and the Tiger Gym facility are also available for rent on a limited basis for parties, youth activities, and sporting events.

Currently, the towns of Valdese and Rutherford Collage are undertaking a Pedestrian Plan that is due to be completed in December of 2015.

### **Children's Memorial Park**

A six acre park, offering two streams for wading, a picnic shelter that can accommodate 125 persons, playground equipment, a baseball diamond, and a jogging trail



*Children's Memorial Park*



## Old Colony Amphitheater and Trail of Faith

Located off of Church Street and Lincoln Avenue NW, the amphitheater and Trail of Faith exhibits are used to tell the story and history of the Waldensians and their migration to Valdese in 1893.

## McGalliard Falls



The site of a Valdese gristmill that operated continuously until 1942, the McGalliard Falls Park was created in 1982. This community park features a 45-foot waterfall, sand volleyball court, tennis, and picnicking facilities. Adjacent to the falls is a replica of the former Meytre's Grist Mill.

## Old Rock School

Located on Main Street in Valdese it was constructed from stones pulled from the fields by the early Waldensians. The school houses the Rock School Arts Gallery which offers exhibit spaces, offices/meeting rooms, theater/auditorium, and walking track.

## City of Morganton

The City of Morganton's Parks and Recreation Department Staff maintains more than 400 acres of land developed for recreational use. Residents and visitors have access to three (3) recreation centers, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a soccer complex, eleven (11) parks, a skeet range, an extensive greenway system, and Catawba Meadows Park, which (alone) covers more than 200 acres along the Catawba River.



Parks and Recreation staff are also responsible for organizing and managing the City's youth and adult sports leagues and yearly leisure activities, as well as special events such as Morganton's Red, White, and Bluegrass Festival. The Red, White and Bluegrass Festival was nominated for IBMA Bluegrass event of the year for 2009, and nominated and selected as one of the Southeast Tourism Society's Top 20 Events for the month of July 2011.



## Bethel Road Park

Located in Morganton on Bethel Road it offers 2- lighted tennis courts, 2- lighted basketball courts, a practice softball field, lighted soccer field, lighted jogging tracks, 2-playground areas, restrooms, 3- family picnic shelters (w/grill & 2 tables each).

## Catawba Meadows Park

Morganton's Catawba Meadows Park is the largest municipal park in western North Carolina. The complex includes a wide variety of facilities, but the focus is amateur baseball and softball. The complex offers 13 professionally designed ball fields. The amateur baseball/softball facilities are accessed by numerous miles of pedestrian paths. This facility is supported by canoe, bike and raft rentals; tennis facilities; a mountain bike trail; a professional disc golf course; picnic areas and host local social and cultural events.



*Catawba Meadows Picnic Shelter*

## Catawba River Soccer Complex

The City of Morganton maintains the 30-acre Catawba River Soccer Complex, a facility that includes two lighted regulation soccer fields, a field house with office, a concession stand, picnic shelter and adventure playground.



*Tennis courts at Carbon City Park*

## Carbon City Park

Located on Highway 70 West, next to a Fire Station, the park offers a group picnic shelter (10 tables), 2-lighted tennis courts, volleyball court, a playground, and rest rooms.

## Cascade Park

This mini park is located off of Morehead Street and offers seating and a view of the creek.



## Collett Street Center & Park

The Center offers a large gym with seating (900 max), meeting rooms, game room, weight/exercise room, mat room, social hall, showers, rest rooms and two (2) kitchens. The site also has five (5) tennis courts and a 50-meter outdoor pool.

## Community House

A special meeting facility located on North King Street that has 2-large dining areas, (one can be divided into three meeting/eating areas), lobby, restrooms, full service kitchen, this special facility is used for group events such as workshops, meetings, receptions, dinners, banquets, and parties.



## Freedom Park

Located next to Freedom High School, this park has a lighted one-mile walking track, softball field, six (6) lighted tennis courts, a baseball field, two (2) practice fields for football or soccer, a playground, rest rooms, four family picnic shelters.

## Gene Turner Park

Located behind Collett Street Center, the park includes 2-lighted youth baseball fields and a field house with rest rooms and a field storage/scorers structure.

## Martha's Park

The 1.4-acre former Children's Park was renovated in 2004 and renamed in honor and memory of Martha Phifer. The park features a fenced, gated play area with playground equipment, water splash pad, swingsets, three (3) picnic shelters, and handicapped accessible restrooms.





## Morganton Municipal Auditorium

The City of Morganton Municipal Auditorium (CoMMA) is a 1,150-seat auditorium/theater that has offices, meeting/class rooms, gallery/exhibition space, and a small outdoor amphitheater lecture area. The seat auditorium/theater is used by the city for a variety of educational, cultural, and entertainment events.

## Mountain Crest Recreation Center

Located on First Street, the center houses a gymnasium (300 max seats), meeting rooms, a game area, kitchen, rest rooms, and showers. There are also outdoor basketball courts, a playground, a lighted softball field, and a 25-meter pool.

## Morganton Greenway

Morganton's Greenway System, which includes the Catawba River Greenway and Freedom Trail Greenway, offers more than four miles of year-round walking, biking, jogging, and picnicking. This beautiful pedestrian pathway is located near downtown Morganton and connects a number of area businesses and destinations.



## Morganton Aquatic Center

Morganton's pool offers public swimming, swim lessons, and may be rented for parties, etc. This facility offers a 25 yard indoor pool.





## Martin Luther King, Jr. Park



Located next to the Mountain View Center, this park includes three family picnic shelters (2- tables each), a playground, and rest rooms.

*Martin Luther King, Jr. Park*

## Shuey Park

Shuey Park was constructed in 1968 with funds raised by the Morganton Parks and Recreation Foundation, Inc. and was named after Harry Shuey (owner of Morganton Furniture and President of the Recreation Foundation). The Park is approximately 16 acres.

Amenities include:

Two (2) lighted softball/baseball fields (270')  
American Legion Baseball Field (350')  
Two (2) concession stands  
Five (5) lighted horseshoe courts

Field house  
Picnic shelter  
Restrooms

## Town of Rhodhiss

The Town maintains the Town of Rhodhiss Park which offers a playground, walking trail, and picnic shelters.

## State and Regional Parks

### Lake James State Park

Tucked into the rolling hill country at the base of mighty Linville Gorge is Lake James, a sprawling 6,812-acre reservoir with more than 150 miles of shoreline. This impressive waterway is the centerpiece of Lake James State Park, where nature offers scenic





vistas of the Appalachian Mountain range and beckons those with an appetite for outdoor recreation.

Families and friends visit one of North Carolina's most popular state parks for a variety of activities -swimming and sunbathing or enjoying a quiet picnic along the lakeshore. The park offers boating, water skiing, or fishing in the lake's cool mountain waters; or taking walks and enjoying the beautiful forest wildflowers and abundant wildlife along park trails.

**Site Amenities:**

Amphitheater  
Bath House  
Fishing Dock, Canoe Rental  
Fire Rings  
Modern Bathrooms  
Food Storage Locker  
Individual and Group Grills  
Paved Parking  
Interpretive Programs  
Swim Beach  
Picnic Shelter

**Activities:**

Fishing  
Hiking  
Mountain biking  
Canoeing/Rafting  
Picnicking  
Swim Beach

**South Mountains State Park**



*Boardwalk at South Mountain State Park*

Located at 3001 South Mountain Park Avenue, Connelly Springs, NC 28612 This park is nestled deep in the woods. South Mountains State Park is the perfect place to enjoy nature via well groomed walking trails with many educational signs to help explain the natural features of this area.

Here you can see a majestic mountain range peeking out from the gently rolling landscape of the piedmont. The park includes elevations up to 3,000 feet, a



waterfall dropping 80 feet and more than 40 miles of trails. From equestrian camping to trout fishing, mountain biking to picnicking, a number of activities are available at South Mountains State Park.

One of the state's most rugged parks, South Mountain Park offers a hiking trail to High Shoals Falls to witness the roar of the waterfall as it pours into a large pool. Visitors may also backpack through the woodlands for primitive camping; fish for trout in miles of mountain streams; or bicycle along the 17-mile mountain-bike loop.

### **Site Amenities**

Paved Parking  
Clean Modern Restrooms/Showers  
Camping (with grill, picnic table, tent pad, Comfort Station  
Primitive camping  
Amphitheater  
Waterfalls with Boardwalk Overlooks  
Interpretive Programing  
Hiking, Biking, and Waking Trails

### **Activities**

Fishing (Trout)  
Hiking  
Camping  
Picnicking facilities  
Educational programming  
Horseback Riding

## **Linear Parks**

### **Burke County – Fonta Flora Loop Trail (under construction)**

The Fonta Flora Loop Trail will provide public access to the multitude of recreational amenities offered at Lake James, including the State Park. These activities include but are not limited to: mountain biking, swimming, picnicking, bird watching, hiking, fishing, etc. Many bicyclists and runners currently use the roads that travel around Lake James on a regular basis; therefore, having a trail adjacent the lake may provide a safer alternative for pedestrians.

The trail will have an average width of 5' and will be approximately 26.2 miles long, depending on the final tread location. The trail will incorporate multiple trailheads at nodal destinations, and provide various access/connector trails.

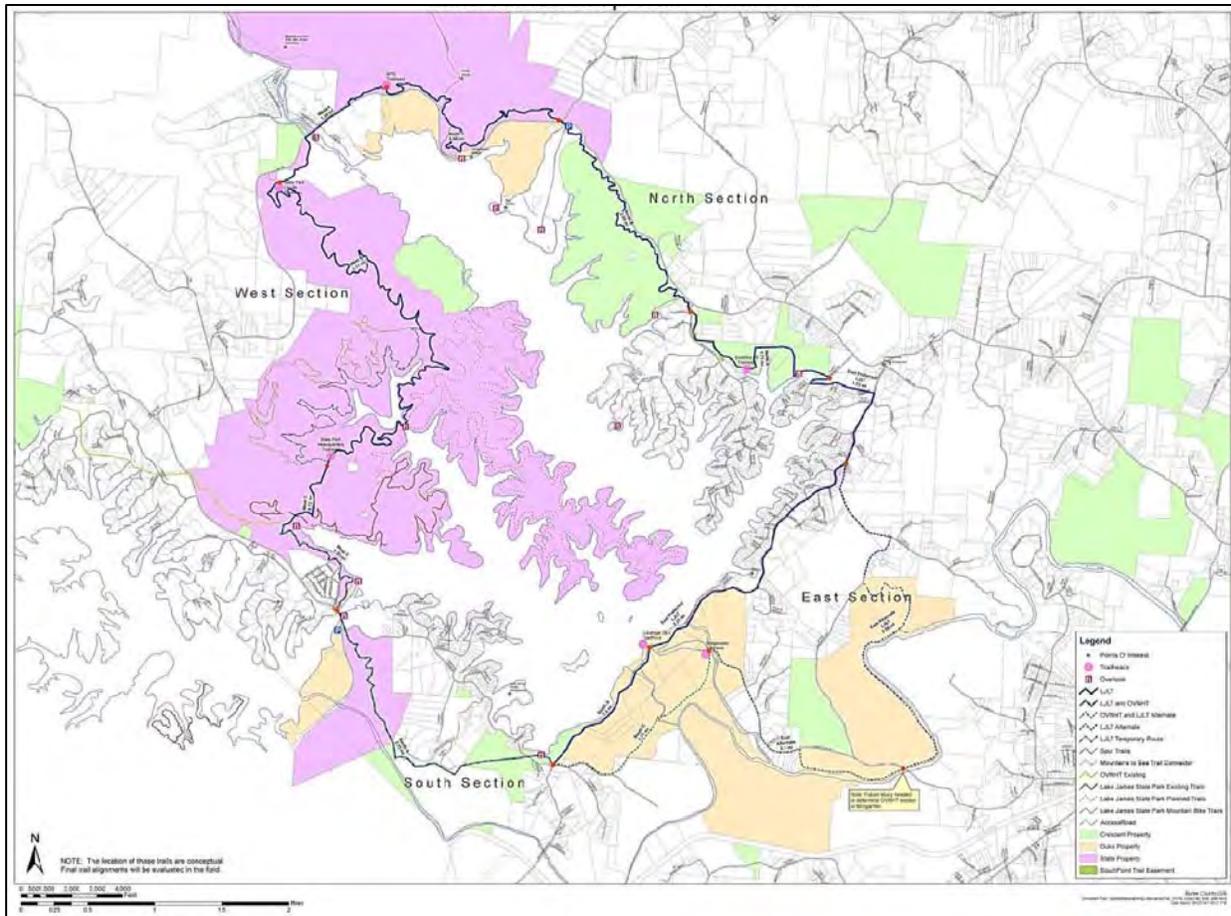
The Lake James Loop Trail will be an easy to moderate multi-use hiking and mountain biking trail with a natural, permeable gravel surface that will encircle Lake James. It is hoped that the trail will provide a multitude of economic, recreational, health, environmental, community, and transportation benefits. The Lake James Loop Trail is intended to serve residents and visitors.

This initiative represents a cooperative venture between Burke County, Duke Energy, Crescent Communities, North Carolina State Parks, North Carolina



Wildlife Resources Commission, private landowners, area residents, and volunteers.

**Fonta Flora Loop Trail at Lake James**



See a larger version of this map in the Appendix.

**Morganton**



- **Catawba River Greenway**  
This well used corridor provides approximately 3.8 miles of paved, scenic trail.
- **Freedom Trail Greenway**  
This trail is approximately .6 miles long.



- **Green Street Greenway** This greenway is .4 miles long.
- **Access Trails**  
There are an additional 3.5 miles of access trails provided in Morganton at various locations along the Greenway routes.

## Valdese

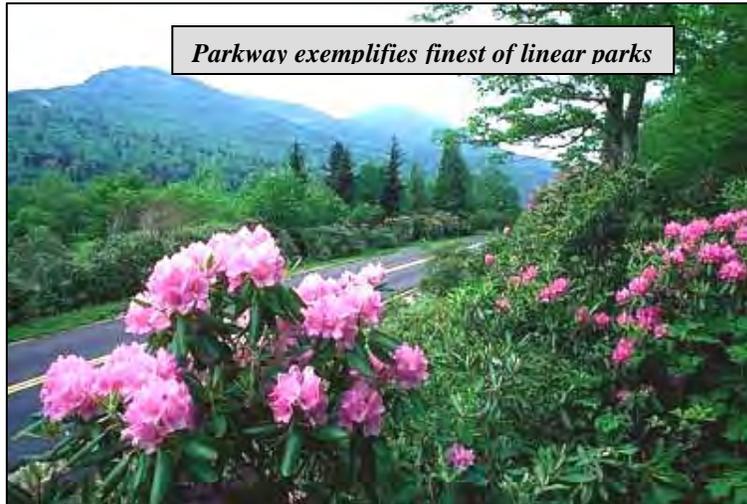
Valdese offers about 2.5 miles of recreational trail. The Town plans to propose a greenway to connect with Rutherford College in the Draft of their 2015 Pedestrian Plan.

## Hildebran

Hildebran offers about 1.5 miles of recreational trail.

## Blue Ridge Parkway (National Facility)

Residents and visitors of the Burke County region of northwestern North Carolina have easy access to the 469 miles of outstanding scenery along the Blue Ridge Parkway, which extends from the Shenandoah National Park (north) to the Great Smoky Mountains (south).



A *linear park* is developed for one or more modes of recreational travel. The idea for this wondrous stretch of two-lane, 45-mph, limited access roadway goes back to the 1930's, when economic and social forces converged with natural ones. A young landscape architect went to work on a vision to create a series of recreational parks along the Parkway's complete length. The legacy of that vision is the existence (at an average of 30 to 40 miles apart) of the parks and recreational sites that are one of the major attractions of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Folks traveling the parkway can enjoy picnic areas, trails, lodging, shopping, majestic views at overlooks, historic sites, and visitor centers. A mile-by-mile overview of these parks as well as other significant spots along the roadway (restrooms, gasoline, and highway crossings) can be found in the Visitor's Guide.



## Mountains-to-Sea Trail (State of North Carolina)

This Blue Ridge Parkway Segment of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is a backcountry trail ascending and descending nearly 193 miles with the contours of the parkway – crossing expansive forests, wildflowers gardens, major rivers, and historic sites. Through the contributions of diverse partners, this trail will stretch 935 miles when completed (from Clingman’s Dome in Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey’s Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks) – connecting 37 counties in North Carolina – which include numerous municipalities, state parks, and U. S. Forest Service lands.



## North Carolina Birding Trail

The North Carolina Birding Trail has 4 specific viewing sites in Burke County: Lake James State Park, South Mountain State Park, Catawba River Greenway Trail, and the South Mountain Game Lands.

## Pisgah Loop Scenic Byway

The panoramic 47-mile Pisgah Loop Scenic Byway leads travelers on a voyage through beautiful and historic locations and natural wonder as it winds north from The City of Morganton to Linville Falls and the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area, then it descends to the piedmont and the spectacular shoreline of the scenic Lake James on its return to Morganton. Dedicated in June 2005, this 49th scenic byway in North Carolina includes 15 miles of rugged, unpaved U.S. Forest Service Road and amazing views of the Linville Gorge.

## Table Rock Trail

The trail that takes hikers to the top of Table Rock is approximately 1.5 miles

## Lake James - Shortoff Mountain Trail

The Lake James-Shortoff Mountain Trail is approximately 4.4 miles long

## Wolfpit - Shortoff Mountain Trail

The Wolfpit-Shortoff Mountain Trail is approximately 5 miles long.



## Timber Ridge Trail

The Timber Ridge Trail is approximately 4 miles in length.

## Linville Gorge Trail

The Linville Gorge Trail is approximately 11.5 miles in length

## Overmountain Victory Trail

The Overmountain (National Historic) Victory Trail extends through four (4) states – Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina – and retraces the 330-mile route of the Patriot Militia as they tracked down the British Tories during the American Revolutionary War. Eventually the two (2) forces clashed, ending in a patriotic victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain. The Overmountain Victory



*Overmountain Victory Trail users commemorate American Revolutionary War*

Trail Association (OVTA) hosts a commemorative two-week march, tracing the 1780 campaign, each year.

## National Parks and Recreational areas



### Linville Gorge Wilderness Area

Located in the northern end of Burke County, the Linville Gorge is a steep canyon of nearly vertical cliffs, rhododendron and laurel thickets, and the tumbling white waters of the Linville River. Attracting avid hikers, sightseers, climbers, hunters, bird watchers and fisherman, the Gorge

is also home to a variety of flora and fauna. It harbors rare and endangered plants, such as Hudsonia Montana and the Heller's Blazing star, as well. Some 40 miles of trails give access to the primitive wonders of the place, ringed about its rim by dramatic rock formations visible for miles around. The Gorge is famous not only as the most rugged wilderness area east of the Mississippi River.



## Linville Falls

Having wound peacefully through farmland from its sources in the Grandfather Mountain area to the north, the Linville River plummets in two great steps some 90 feet to a churning pool of water; then, it begins its 12-mile descent through the Linville Gorge to Lake James in the south. This location was the back drop of the film 'The Last of the Mohicans. Today, both the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service maintain visitor centers and a series of trails that lead to various dramatic overlooks of the Falls and down to the riverside. The Falls are a seasonal interest that draws visitors from all over the U.S. Walking/Hiking trails in the area include 1.6 miles of trail in the Linville Falls Trail; and 1.8 miles in the Upper Creek Falls Loop Trail.

## Pisgah National Forest

Provided by the federal government (US Forest Service) The forest offers outdoor recreational opportunities such as campgrounds (all types), hundreds of miles of nature/hiking trails, horse trails, fishing access, picnic areas, scenic overlooks, and educational and informational programs and facilities.



## North Carolina Game Lands

Of the nearly two million acres of game land in North Carolina, Burke County is blessed with access to a large portion of these wild forest areas that allow for hunting, trapping, and fishing.



- **South Mountains Game Land** (Burke, Cleveland, McDowell, and Rutherford Counties) - 21,647 acres
- **Johns River Game Land** (Burke County) - 3,893 acres
- **Pisgah National Forest** (Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Haywood, Hendersonville,

Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey Counties) - 503,776 acres



## **Private Facilities**

### **Phifer Wellness Center**



This is a modern fitness facility with professional staff and trainers. This facility offers; massage whirlpool, racquetball, and gym. Swimming is provided in a 5 lane, 25 yard heated indoor swimming pool open year round for members to enjoy.

Upstairs, members can participate in a variety of aerobic classes offered in the aerobic studio. Phifer also offers the area's most comprehensive fitness floor, comprised of state-of-the-art cardiovascular, strength training, and free weight equipment.

### **Area Golf Courses**

There are a number of golf courses in or near Burke County. These include:

- Mimosa Hills Golf Club (private, 18 hole),
- Pine Mountain (public/private, 18 hole),
- Par 3 at Quaker Meadows Golf Club (public, 9 hole),
- Quaker Meadows Golf Club (public, 18 hole),
- Silver Creek Golf Course (public/private, 18 hole),
- Orchard Hills Golf Course (public/private, 18 hole)
- Marion Lake Club (McDowell County, private, 18 hole)





### 3.3 GENERAL RECREATION PROGRAMING

Burke County Parks and Recreation provides organized programs for the enjoyment of its residents. Typically, these programs include leisure classes, workshops, clubs, instruction, trips, athletic leagues, and special events for citizens of all ages. The athletic programs are scattered around the county at various facilities in order to accommodate scheduling. Previous studies (2000 Burke County Parks and Recreation Master Plan) indicate that annual attendance for all programs and events was close to 80,000 visitors.

Burke County offers the following programs and events:

- Adult/Youth Softball*
- Youth Baseball*
- Youth T-Ball*
- Youth Basketball*
- Youth/Adult 3-0n-3 Basketball*



*Annual Easter Egg Hunt*

- Youth Football*
- Youth Indoor Soccer*
- Cheerleading*
- Fitness Classes*
- Outdoor Soccer*
- Tae-Kwon-Do*
- Karate*
- Gymnastics/Tumbling*
- Book Fairs*
- Tennis Instruction*
- Annual Easter Egg Hunt*

Currently, the Burke County Parks and Recreation Department manages up to 214 youth basketball teams, 167 indoor soccer teams, 30 outdoor soccer teams, 41 football teams, and 58 Baseball/Softball teams with limited staffing and through the use of athletic facilities based at local schools. Needless to say, programming and scheduling of practice times and games competes with and must be worked around the needs of the various host school's functions.

**- END OF SECTION -**



## **SECTION 4 RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**



Although, Burke County is not the primary provider of recreation in this regional area, the County wants to ensure that recreational opportunities are available for all residents. The County Parks and Recreation Department wishes to meet the needs of residents well into the future.

The degree of need for parks and open space is most directly influenced by the expectations of the residents of the Burke County and related strictly to the ‘quality of life’ to which they aspire. This Comprehensive Master Plan addresses (as its first priority) the parks and recreation facility needs, which are envisioned appropriate for all the residents of Burke County.

This Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan will be used as a guide for improving all recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Section 3 of this Master Plan inventories existing park facilities of Burke County and the recreation facilities of other providers within the County’s limits. This detailed inventory includes the facilities which are available within each park in order to create a better understanding of the existing recreation opportunities in the Burke County area. The demographic and population trends (found in Section 2 of the Master Plan) provide information needed to understand the demographic make-up of Burke County for the next ten years.



Community input, current recreation demand, and recreation standards were used as the primary methods in determining the adequate type(s) and amount(s) of park facilities needed for Burke County. This Master Plan compares standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), an independent, non-profit professional organization for park/recreation departments nationwide. In 1996, NRPA published a manual entitled, *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, which is a widely accepted reference standard for municipalities.

Standards are guidelines, not requirements, for use by communities in estimating the demand for recreation in their given geographic areas. NRPA's 1996 guidelines shifted its emphasis from the rigid park facility standards to more flexible standards, which better accommodate unique circumstances and situations that exist in every community. To assure that Burke County's Master Plan contains distinctiveness, yet versatility, public input was sought from its integral components: various Burke County Staff, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee, the Board of County Commissioners, and citizen representatives.

## **4.2 PUBLIC INPUT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

The methodology used in establishing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan should always include citizen input. In order to ensure a successful study, it is vital that the public users of recreational facilities be able to share their issues, needs, and desires.

### **Community Meetings**

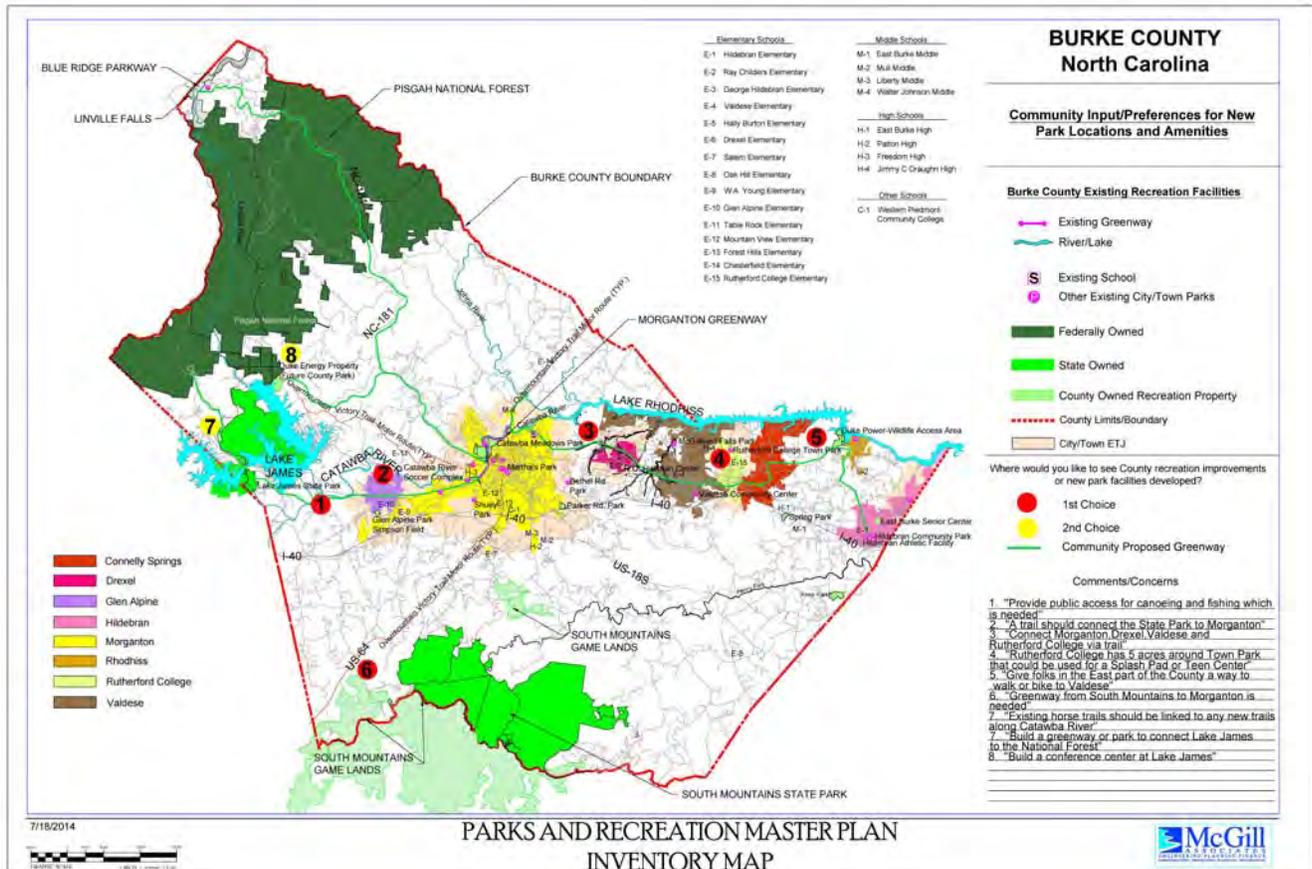
To facilitate community input, four public input sessions were conducted during the Master Plan process. The first opportunity was at the Waldensian Festival in downtown Valdese on Saturday, August 9, 2014. The second Community Meeting was held at the Burke County Planning Department – Meeting/Hearing Room in downtown Morganton (110 N. Green Street) on August 28<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. The third and fourth community



meetings were held during the Historic Morganton Festival Friday, September 5<sup>th</sup> (8:30 am thru 5:00 pm) and Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> (8:30 am thru 12:00 pm).



The meetings provided an opportunity for residents to learn about the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Study, voice their opinion, concerns and ideas for future facilities, participate in a mapping exercise and take a survey on needed improvements to the County facilities, as well as programming, and the Recreation system as a whole.



**See 11"x17" version of this map in Appendix C**

The results of the community surveys were compiled with the online survey results and can be seen later in this section. Also a map exercise was undertaken at each community outreach. The combined comments and suggested locations for new recreation facilities can be seen in the results survey, as well.

As part of the mapping exercise participants were asked to mark what activities or recreation amenities they would like to see offered within the County. The following list enumerates the comments and concerns of the participants concerning what new facilities/activities or what improvements should be made:

- "Better pedestrian connectivity between the local Towns"
- "Build a Greenway from Lake James State Park to Morganton and Valdese"



- "The existing trail used by locals for exercise and is owned by the Town of Valdese (near water treatment plant), should be converted into a public park"
- "The County needs better areas for picnics and family get-togethers"
- "Provide public access for canoeing and fishing which is needed"
- "A trail should connect the State Park to Morganton"
- "Connect Morganton, Drexel, Valdese and Rutherford College via trail"
- "Rutherford College has 5 acres around Town Park that could be used for a Splash Pad or Teen Center"
- "Build a community center at Lake James"
- "Give folks in the East part of the County a way to walk or bike to Valdese"
- "Greenway from South Mountains to Morganton is needed"
- "Existing horse trails should be linked to any new trails along Catawba River"

The community meetings were undertaken to receive input from community members as to what they think are the recreation needs for the citizens of Burke County. From the mapping exercise alone, it is fairly obvious that the participants placed a high priority on *developing trails* to connect the different local municipalities

## **Community Survey**

Active participation from residents in Burke County was crucial in developing a Comprehensive Master Plan that reflects the true needs of the population. With this in mind, community input was solicited throughout the entire planning process. To gather further public input a survey which was advertised in the local newspaper, via the County web page as well as made available at the community outreach sessions. This section summarizes the results of the community survey.

714 total surveys were returned representing approximately 2,185 residents. The respondents adequately reflected a representative cross section of Burke County in terms of age and household size.

The surveys were designed to elicit answers on residents' needs and desires for recreation opportunities. They included a section where respondents rated their participation in existing programs and use of existing facilities. The survey also asked respondents to rank the programs and facilities in order of importance to their household and asked them to list the facilities they would like to see added to the park and recreation system. To determine the profile of respondents, a series of demographic questions were asked.

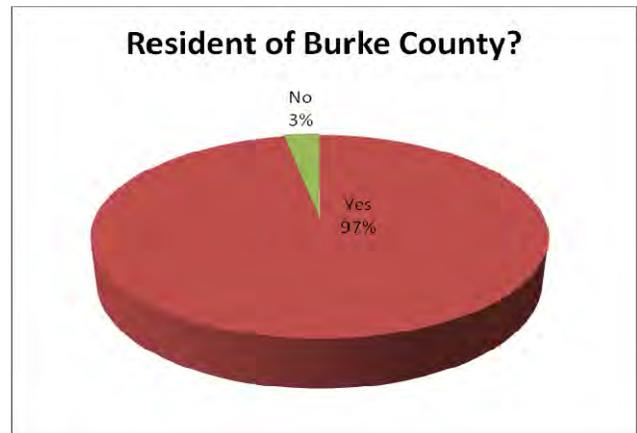
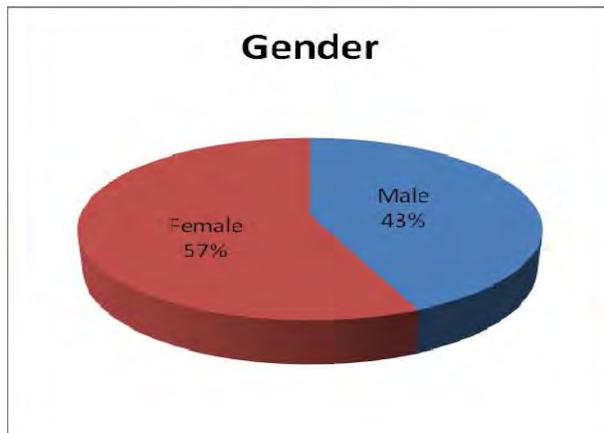


The following pages consist of the results of the community surveys and mapping exercises. They are presented by means of charts and graphs.

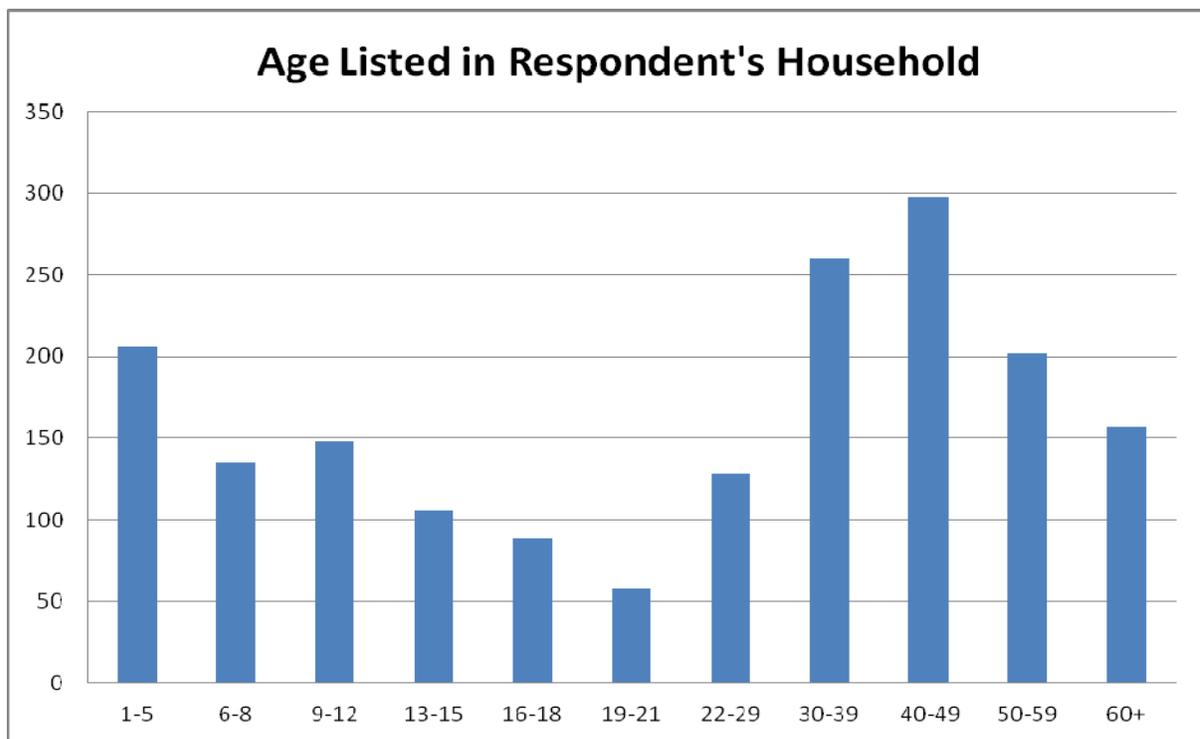


## **Burke County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Survey** (714 Completed Surveys representing 2,185 individuals)

### **Demographics**



Of the total number of respondents, 43% were male and 57% were female. 97% of the respondents were residents of Burke County. The majority of survey respondents were in the 30-49 age range.





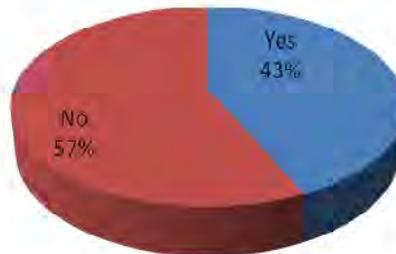
**Do you live within a 3 mile of a public park or recreation facility?**



65% of survey respondents reported living within three (3) miles of a park or recreation facility.

A question aimed at identifying where survey respondents lived revealed that approximately 57% of respondents live within an urban corridor and 43% live within rural Burke County.

**Do you use any school or private facilities for recreation or leisure activities? If so which ones?**

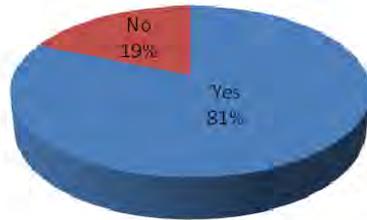


Top 5 School and private facilities used by 43% of the responders:

1. Valdese Recreation Center
2. Phifer Wellness Center
3. Oak Hill Schools
4. YMCA in surrounding Counties
5. Freedom High School and Parks

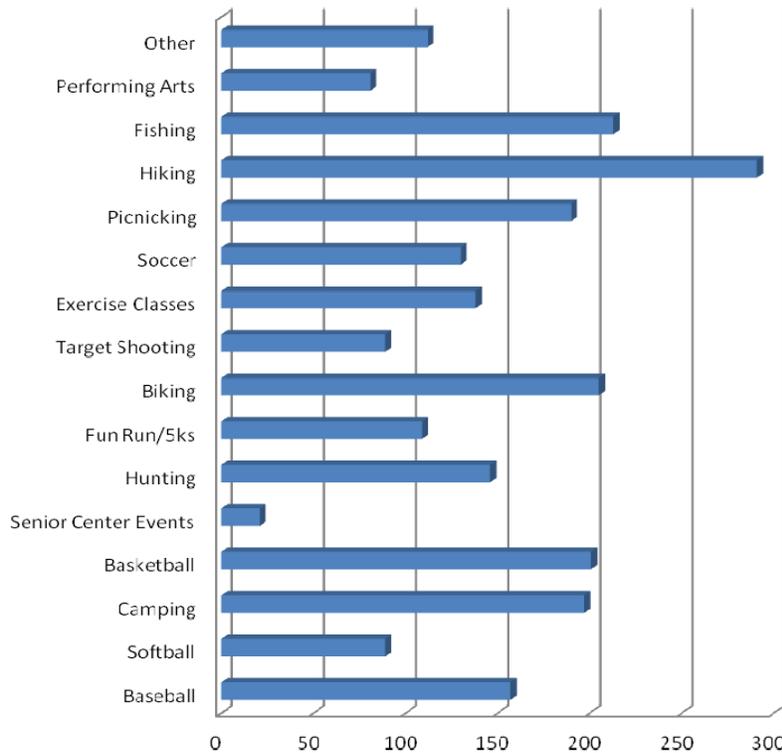


**Would you use a park or recreation facility more if it were closer to your home or work?**



81% of those asked reported they would use a park or recreation facility if it was in closer proximity.

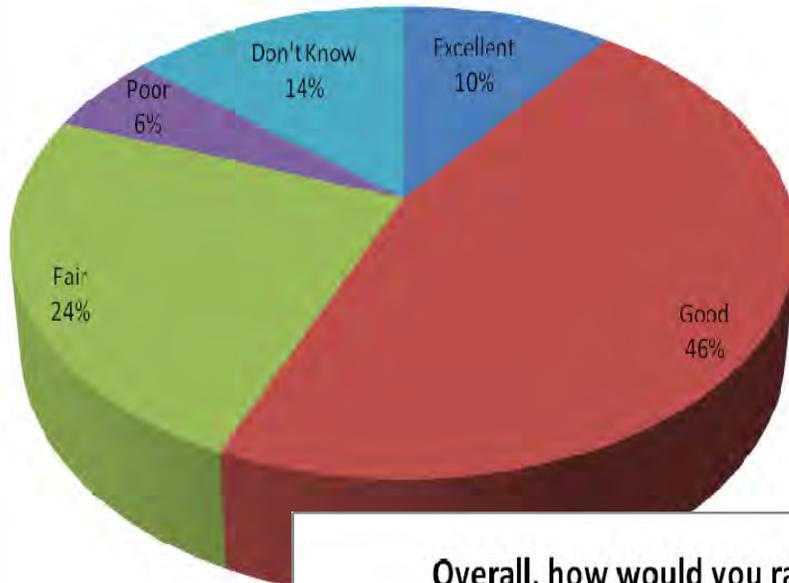
**In which of the following recreation activities and/or special events do you or others in your household participate regularly?**



A large number of the survey respondents reported Hiking as a regular activity. Also Fishing, Biking, Basketball, and Camping rated high in usual participation.

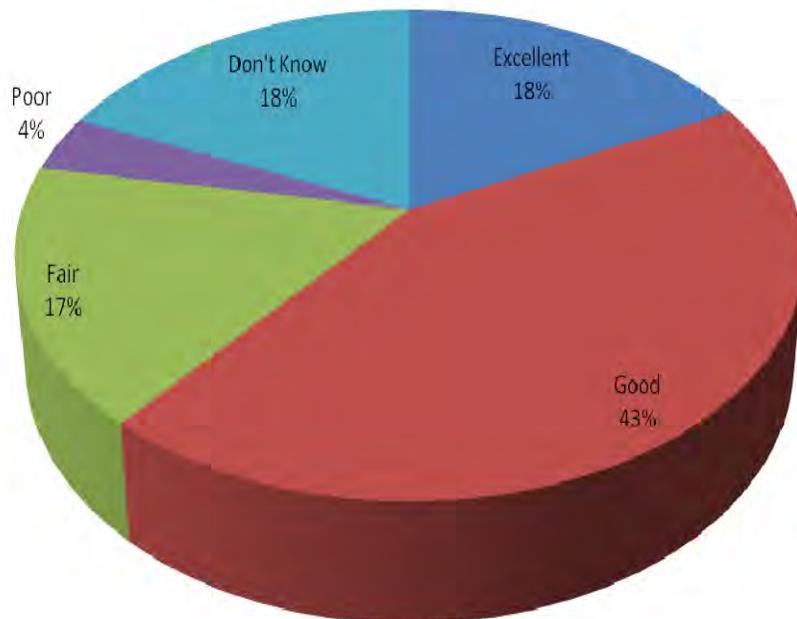


### Overall, how would you rate the recreational programs offered in Burke County?



The majority of survey respondents (70%) rate the quality of the programs offered to be *good to fair*, while another 10% rated the programming as excellent. Only 6% felt the programs offered by the Parks and Recreation to be of *poor* quality. This is a very positive overall public perception.

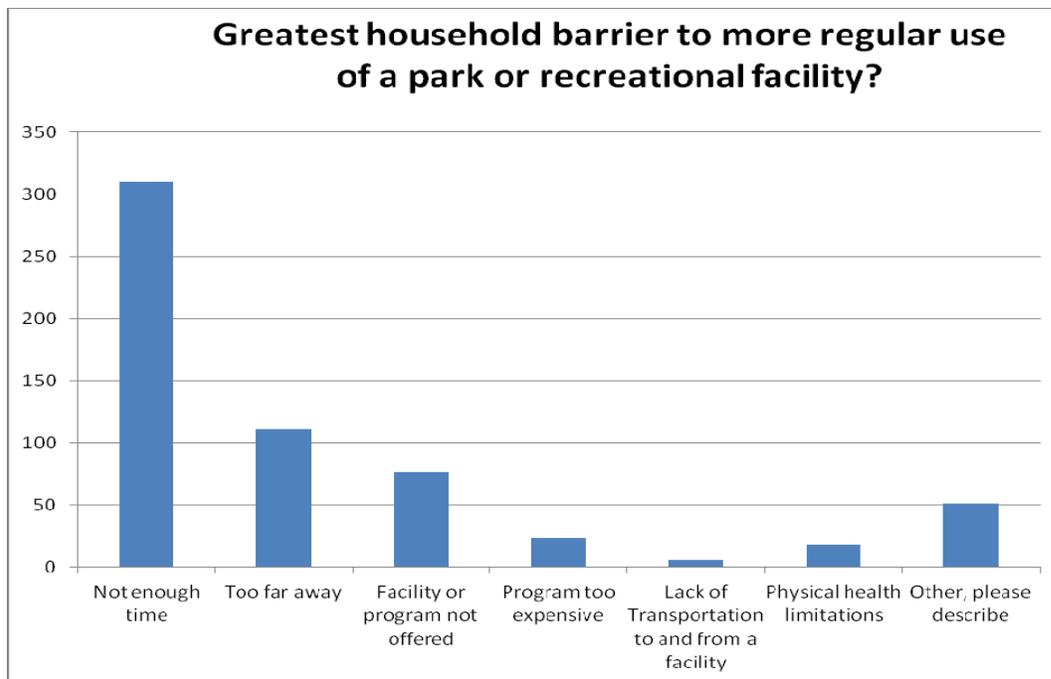
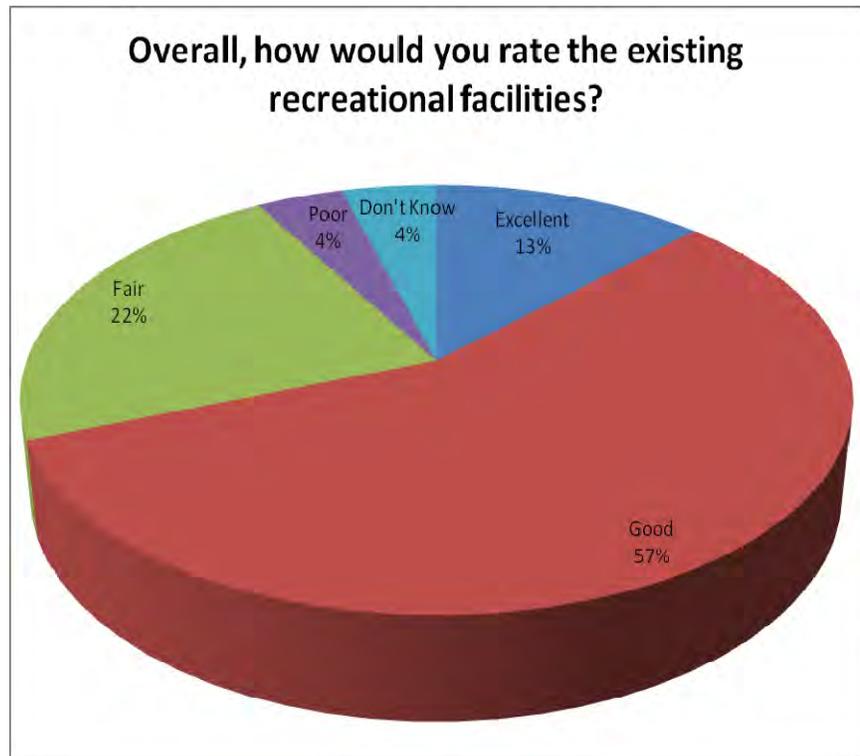
### Overall, how would you rate the Burke County Parks and Recreation staff performance?



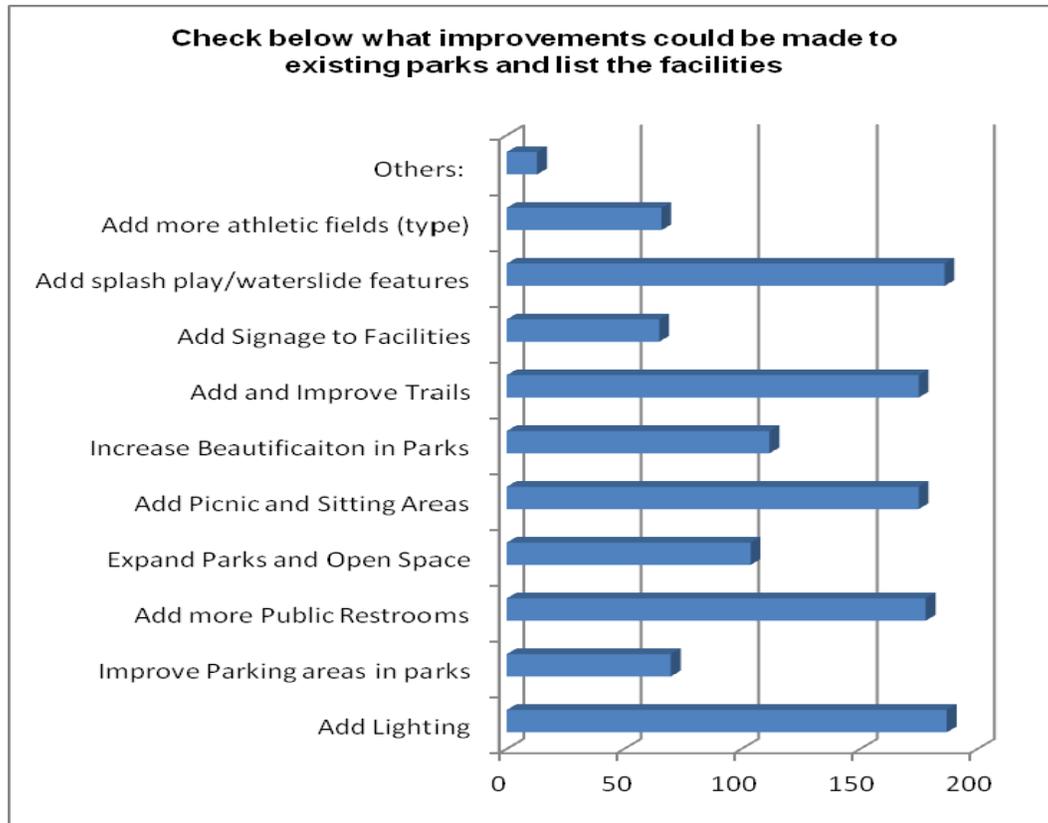
61% of the survey respondents reported Parks and Recreation staff to performing in the range from *good to excellent*.



Recreational facilities also got a very positive overall opinion from survey respondents. 70% rated the facilities as *good to excellent*. Only 4% felt the facilities were *poor*.



Survey respondents reported *not having enough time* as the greatest barrier in not being able to regularly use and enjoy park and recreational facilities.



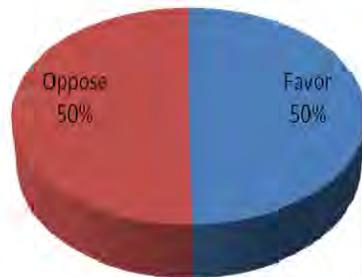
Survey respondents reported the highest desire for improvements to be adding *splash play or waterslide features* and *adding lighting* to existing facilities. Additional improvements to trails, picnic and sitting areas, and public restrooms were the next most desirable improvements that could be made to existing parks and facilities.



73% of survey respondents reported a willingness to pay a nominal fee to attend events or to use a special facility. Respondents were divided on the issue of being willing to increase taxes in support of recreational programs/facilities.



### Would you favor or oppose increasing taxes to expand recreation opportunities in the County?



### Would you support extending Greenway Trail from Morganton to Lake James?



89% of those asked reported they would support Greenway/ Trails that would connect areas within the county; in particular, the extension of the Greenway Trail from Morganton to Lake James.

### Would you support additional Greenway/Trails that would connect to destination areas within and without the county?





**Rank in order of importance the top ten facilities that could be developed or improved in Burke County. (1 being your highest priority, 10 being your lowest). Please consider other members of your household as well.**

Below are the number one choices made by survey respondents in order from greatest to least:

1. Greenway Trails (13.2 %)
2. Jogging/Walking Trails (11.7%)
3. Bike Trails (10.4%)
4. Fitness Facility (Cardio/Strength) (10.4%)
5. Hiking Trails (10.3%)
6. Playgrounds (9.6%)
7. Indoor Swimming Pool (9.3%)
8. Fishing Opportunities (9.1%)
9. Community Recreation Center (8.7%)
10. Multi-Sport Complex (7.2%)

## Conclusions

Using the data from the survey we can determine patterns of use at existing facilities and make decisions on future facilities/programming at existing parks and at new locations. The majority of respondents in the survey were residents of the County. Slightly more women than men took the survey

The age brackets represented were weighted towards adults aged 30-49 years of age followed by children and then seniors.

Survey respondents reported using the Morganton Greenway and Catawba Meadows facilities the most out of their options within the County. This was followed by use of the Pisgah National Forest and Lake James State Park. Of the County owned facilities, the Old County Courthouse was visited more than Reep, Parker Road, and Spring Parks. The later three facilities received equal responses for use along with the



*Morganton Greenway and Old Courthouse Park were favorites of Burke County respondents*

Burke Senior Center. (These survey responses were not shown graphically.)



81% of the respondents said that they would use a recreation facility more often if it was closer to their home and work. Since most of Burke County's facilities are located fairly centrally in Morganton, the County needs to explore ways to expand facilities and opportunities to other areas of Burke County where people work, play, and live.

Overall, the respondents rated the facilities offered by Parks and Recreation Department as Good to Excellent (70%) while park programming received 56% Excellent to Good response.

57% of respondents reported not using school or private recreation facilities.

When asked what improvements need to be made to existing Burke County Parks and Recreation facilities the most common response was lighting at existing facilities. However, the addition of a splash pad/water slide came in a close second.

Survey participants overwhelmingly supported (89%) the development of greenways and trails. 73% of participants were in favor of paying fees for special events while the issue of supporting a rise in taxes to pay for facilities and programs was even at 50%.

### 4.3 STATE AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Surveys, which are designed to determine the demand for outdoor recreation and facilities, have been conducted on both the federal and state levels, by the President's Commission on Americas Outdoor and the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey, respectively. Significant facts that have evolved from these surveys are:

- The top ten most popular outdoor recreational activities (nationwide) are:

1. Picnicking
2. Driving for pleasure
3. Swimming
4. Sightseeing
5. Walking for pleasure
6. Playing sports
7. Fishing
8. Attending sports events
9. Boating
10. Bicycling



- The most rapidly growing outdoor activities (nationwide) are:

1. Canoeing
2. Bicycling
3. Attending sports events
4. Camping (all types)
5. Sailing
6. Hiking/Backpacking
7. Walking for pleasure
8. Water Skiing



- The top ten most popular outdoor activities (North Carolina) are:
  1. Walking for pleasure
  2. Driving for pleasure
  3. Viewing scenery
  4. Beach Activities
  5. Visiting Historical Sites
  6. Swimming (lakes, rivers, & oceans)
  7. Visiting Natural Areas
  8. Picnicking
  9. Attending Sports Events
  10. Visiting Zoos



- Local governments (cities and counties) provide 39% of the public recreational opportunities in the United States.

#### 4.4 TYPES OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

A comprehensive park system is made up of a variety of park types, ranging from small neighborhood playgrounds to larger parks with athletic fields, playgrounds, community centers and open space. They reflect the differing recreational and preferences of diverse users. Park models are used as guidelines for fulfilling the future recreational needs of communities. Not all of these types of parks are the responsibility of the municipal agency; several agencies (federal, state, cities, and/or Countys,) play roles in providing recreational opportunities as well. To further understand the County's role in providing recreation services to its citizens, it is necessary to understand the elements of a comprehensive park system. These types of parks and recreation facilities may or may not be included in comprehensive park systems and are delineated in the following pages of this section. Please note that these are only schematic representations.



- Regional Parks
- District Parks
- Community Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Mini Parks
- Linear Parks/Greenways
- Special Use Facilities
- Open Space

*South Mountain State Park is a regional park in Burke County and area*



## **Regional Parks**

Regional parks are typically very large sites. On these sites, the unique qualities that exemplify the natural features found there, such as the diverse land formation, vegetation, and wildlife, are preserved. Parks containing environmental centers, campsites, nature trails, observation decks and picnic areas are examples of the types of facilities that are usually provided in regional parks. In addition, open fields for non-structured activities, such as Frisbee-throwing or kite-flying, are also generally found there.

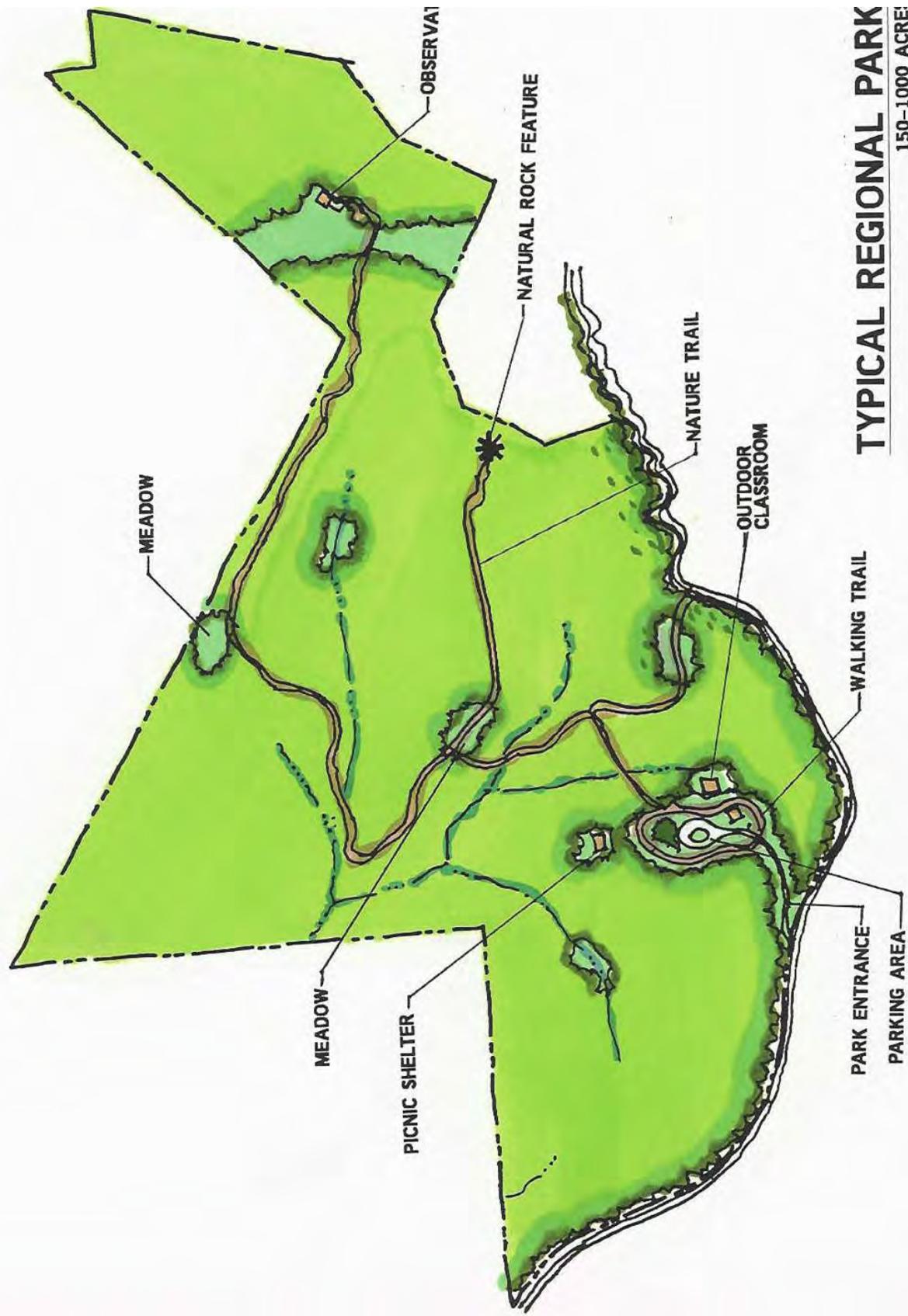
When land is acquired for the development of regional parks (or the expansion of existing sites), it should be comprised of the previously mentioned characteristics, accompanied by natural water features such as lakes, rivers or creeks. The majority of the site should be reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation.

The acquisition and development of regional parks are typically undertaken by a federal or state agency. **Lake James State Park and South Mountains State Park are regional parks in the Burke County area.**

### **Specific standards/criteria for developing regional parks are as follows:**

<b><u>Service area:</u></b>	Region-wide
<b><u>Acreage/Population Ratio:</u></b>	10 acres per 1,000 persons
<b><u>Minimum Size:</u></b>	150-1,000 acres minimum with sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed (10% of the site may be developed with facilities found in Community Parks.)
<b><u>Typical Facilities:</u></b>	Environmental Center Primitive Camping Recreational Vehicle Camping Observation Deck Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter) Fishing Piers/Boat Docks Caretaker's House
Equestrian Center	
Group Camping	
Nature Trails	
Picnic Shelters and Grills	
Restrooms/Vending	
Swimming	
Boating	
Parking	

See diagram below.





## **District Parks**

A district park functions as the major source of active recreation for several neighborhoods within a community. District parks are intensely developed, offering a multitude of facilities in order to serve their intended geographic user area. Activities are balanced between active and passive recreation. District Parks are typically developed to accommodate athletic league sporting events and tournament competition. Passive recreation opportunities are found in the undisturbed areas, preferably within surrounding buffers. District parks present great opportunities for non-traditional types of recreation.

Sites for district parks should be relatively level to alleviate excessive grading for the active facilities. Where possible, there should be an equal balance of wooded and cleared areas. If a natural water feature is present, the adjoining land should be developed primarily as passive recreation. Accessibility to neighborhoods should be an important consideration when choosing sites.

The development of district parks is typically the responsibility of county or municipal agencies.

### **Specific standards/criteria for developing district parks are as follows:**

<b><u>Service area:</u></b>	1 to 2 ½ mile radius
<b><u>Acreage/Population Ratio:</u></b>	5 acres per 1,000 persons
<b><u>Desirable Range:</u></b>	75-200 acres
<b><u>Desirable Size:</u></b>	+100 acres
<b><u>Typical Facilities:</u></b>	Playgrounds
Tennis Courts (lighted)	Full or Half Size Basketball Courts
Volleyball Courts	Baseball/Softball/Multi-Purpose Field
Soccer/Football Field	Soccer Practice Field (movable goals)
Nature Trail	Picnic Tables with Grill (with/without shelter)
Parking/Service Yard	Benches or Bench Swings
Restrooms/Concessions	50% of Site Remains Undeveloped
<b><u>*Alternate Facilities:</u></b>	Recreation Center
Tennis Center	Amphitheatre
Observation Decks	Fishing Piers/Boating/Boat Dock

\* Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.



**TYPICAL DISTRICT PARK**  
75-200 ACRES



## **Community Parks**

Community parks focus on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Compared to district parks, community parks have a smaller range of recreation facilities. They may host athletic league sports events and provide passive recreation. Fifty percent of the community park property should be developed for only passive recreation, with these relatively undisturbed areas serving as buffers around the park and/or acting as buffers between active facilities.

Community park sites should have varying topography and vegetation. A variety of tree species should also be present in forested areas. Community parks should contain cleared areas for the purpose of locating active recreational facilities. At least one natural water feature (lake, river or creek) is desirable in a community park. The land acquired for use as a community park should be contiguous in nature and strategically located in order to provide access for all users within the community that it serves. **Spring, Reep, and Simpson Parks are examples of a community park owned by Burke County.**

The development of community parks typically falls within the realm of municipal responsibilities.

**Specific standards/criteria for developing community parks are as follows:**

<b><u>Service area:</u></b>	1 to 2 mile radius
<b><u>Acreage/Population Ratio:</u></b>	2-5 acres per 1,000 persons
<b><u>Desirable Range:</u></b>	15-50 acres
<b><u>Desirable Size:</u></b>	25 acres
<b><u>Typical Facilities:</u></b>	Playgrounds Full Size or Half Size Basketball Courts Tennis/Volleyball Courts 50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped Soccer/Multi-Purpose Fields Swimming Pool Picnic Tables/Shelter with/without Grills Nature Trails Benches or Bench Swings Restrooms/Concessions Parking





## **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks offer the public a convenient source of recreation, while serving as the recreational and social focus for the neighborhood. Usually located within walking distance of the area serviced, neighborhood parks provide both active and passive recreation opportunities, which are of interest to all age groups. The smaller size of neighborhood parks, as compared to those previously mentioned, requires intense development, with fifty percent of each site remaining undisturbed and thereby serving as a buffer between the park and adjacent property owners. **Currently, Parker Road Park is an example of a neighborhood park owned and operated by Burke County**

### **Specific standards/criteria for neighborhood parks are as follows:**

<b><u>Service area:</u></b>	¾ to 1 mile radius to serve walk-in
<b><u>Acreeage/Population Ratio:</u></b>	2 acres per 1,000 persons
<b><u>Desirable Size:</u></b>	7-15 acres
<b><u>Typical Facilities:</u></b>	Playground Softball or Baseball Field 50% of Site to Remain Undeveloped Multi-Purpose Field Half Basketball Courts Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter) Picnic Shelter with Grill Benches or Bench Swings
<b><u>*Alternate Facilities:</u></b>	Tennis Courts Nature Trails



**TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

7-15 Acres



## **Mini Parks**

The function of a mini park is to provide very limited, isolated and/or unique recreational needs. Mini parks are the smallest classification of parks that exist. They are often served by school and church playgrounds. These parks are located within walking distance of the area served and they provide limited recreational activities. Their very small size requires intense development; there is little or no buffer between mini parks and adjacent property owners. **Currently, the Brown Mountain Overlook (park) is an example of a mini park owned and operated by Burke County.**

### **Specific standards/criteria for mini parks are as follows:**

**Service area:** ¼ to ½ mile radius to serve the walk-in recreation needs of surrounding populations

**Acreage/Population Ratio:** 0.5 acres per 1,000 persons

**Desirable Size:** ±1 acre

**Typical Facilities:**  
Playground  
Half Basketball Courts  
Picnic Tables with Grills (not under shelter)  
Benches or Bench Swings  
Open Play Area

**\*Alternate Facilities:**  
Tennis Courts  
Nature Trails

*Playground areas with open space and/or playground equipment are typical features of mini parks, such as the activity shown here.*





**TYPICAL MINI PARK**



## **Linear Parks/Greenways**

A linear park is an area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel, such as hiking, biking, et cetera. Linear parks are developed for several reasons, including

- 1) to connect existing recreational facilities
- 2) to facilitate public right-of-ways
- 3) to meet public demand.

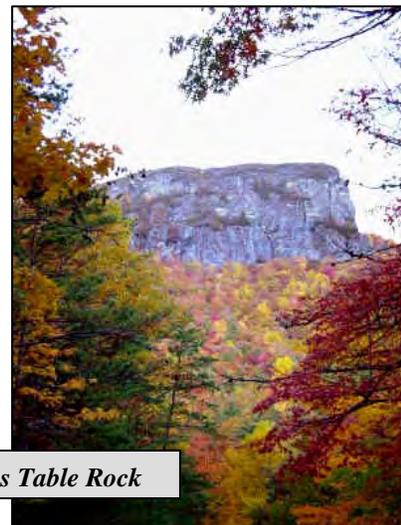
As such, the length and size of linear parks vary considerably, depending on the terrain of the park land and the distance between the entities to be connected, such as parks, schools, homes, businesses and cultural/historical resources. In some cases, a linear park is developed within a large land area designated for protection and management of the natural environment, with recreation opportunities being a secondary objective.



*119 acres endowed by Duke Energy at Lake James State Park will become Burke County's first linear park*

## **Unique or Special Use Facilities**

The unique or special use facilities are park types that exist for the sole purpose of enhancing or utilizing a special man-made or natural feature. They can include beaches, parkways, historical sites, sites of archeological significance, a swimming pool, conservation easements, flood plains, etc. Minimum standards relating to acreage or population have not been established by the park and recreation industry for this category of park. A size that is sufficient to protect and interpret the resource, while providing optimum use, is considered desirable.



*Special Use Facilities emphasis man-made or natural resources, such as Table Rock*



## Open Space

While it is realistic and appropriate to adopt population-based standards for park land and facilities, it is not realistic to establish open space standards. The more reasonable method of establishing appropriate standards for open space is to determine the criteria necessary for the protection of the significant natural areas contain therein.



Public open space is defined as: any land acquired for the purpose of keeping it in a (primarily) undeveloped state. The functions of open space include:

- 1) Preservation of drainage areas for water supplies (watersheds)
- 2) Protection of areas which are well suited for growing crops (farmland)
- 3) Protection of communities to prevent urban sprawl (greenbelts)
- 4) Protection of wildlife habitat (sanctuaries)
- 5) Protection of approach and take-off areas near airports (clear zones)
- 6) Protection of undevelopable land (landfills)
- 7) Protection of areas aesthetically pleasing for a corridor (viewshed).

## 4.5 EVALUATION OF PARK LAND NEEDS

When comparing a park system to national standards, one method is to examine the total acreage of the park system. The NRPA Park land guidelines (in acres) for the total service population of Burke County are provided in the table below. The acreage requirement is based on the population ratio method (acres of park land per population of 1,000) pre-established for each classification of parks.

### **PARK ACREAGE BY CLASSIFICATION (Based on NRPA Guidelines)**

TYPE OF PARK	Existing County Acreage	Recommended for 2014 Population (90,723)	Recommended for 2024 Population (92,814)*
<b>REGIONAL PARK (NPS)</b> - 10 acres/1,000persons	<b>0 acres</b>	<b>907 acres</b>	<b>928 acres</b>
<b>DISTRICT PARK</b> - 5 acres/1,000 persons	<b>141 acres</b>	<b>454 acres</b>	<b>464 acres</b>
<b>COMMUNITY PARK</b> - 2.5 acres/1,000 persons	<b>161 acres</b>	<b>227 acres</b>	<b>232 acres</b>
<b>NEIGHBORHOOD PARK</b> - 2 acres/1,000 persons	<b>14 acres</b>	<b>182 acres</b>	<b>186 acres</b>
<b>MINI PARK</b> - 0.5 acres/1,000 persons	<b>.5 acres</b>	<b>45 acres</b>	<b>46 acres</b>

\* Source: US Census Bureau, North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (rounded average of projected population totals)



## **EXISTING ACREAGE**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) developed standards that were intended as guidelines for use at the local level. However, there has recently been a change to how standards of service are calculated. There is no longer a national standard of “x” number of acres of parkland per 1,000 persons, as this method of calculation is now recognized as deficient. The current NRPA methodology calls on each community to determine its own defining blend of natural, social and economic characteristics. Each community is given the opportunity of developing its own standard, or Level of Service (LOS), tailored to an appropriate range, quantity and quality of recreational facilities within its fiscal limits. However, it is cumbersome and expensive for every community to develop an individual standard. Therefore, the previous national standards are still used by most communities.

<b>EXISTING PARK ACREAGE</b>	
<b>Reep Park</b>	<b>107 acres</b>
<b>Parker Road Park</b>	<b>14 acres</b>
<b>Simpson Park</b>	<b>22 acres</b>
<b>Spring Park</b>	<b>32 acres</b>
<b>Brown Mountain Overlook</b>	<b>.5 acres</b>
<b>County Park at Lake James</b>	<b>141 acres</b>
<b>Total County Owned:</b>	<b>316.5 acres</b>

Following a summation of park acreage, it has been determined that Burke County does not meet the national and state acreage guidelines for comprehensive park systems. (See total existing acreage, as compared to total recommended acreage above.) However, the total acreage for park facilities is being met via other governed localities within the County such as Pisgah National Forest, State Parks, etc.



*The Beanstalk Zipline at Catawba Meadows Park helps meet the needs of Burke County residents. Although owned and operated by the City of Morganton, it is the largest municipal park in Western North Carolina.*



## 4.6 EVALUATION OF FACILITY NEEDS

The results of local standards established by the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA), the North Carolina Department of Environment & Natural Resources have been compiled (Table 1) in order to assess the current and future facility needs (Table 2), as follows:

**Table 1: LOCAL STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES**

Facility	NRPA Standards	NCDENR Standards	Burke County Standards (Recommended)
<b>Fields</b>			
Adult Baseball	1/12,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Youth Baseball	1/5000	1/5000	1/5000
Softball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Football	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Soccer	1/10,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
<b>Courts</b>			
Basketball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Tennis	1/2,000	1/2,000	1/2,000
Volleyball	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/5,000
Shuffleboard	1/5000	1/5000	1/5000
Horseshoe	1/12,000	1/5000	1/5000
<b>Outdoor Areas</b>			
Picnic Shelter	N/A	1/3,000	1/3,000
Playground Activities	N/A	1/3,000	1/3,000
Amphitheater	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
<b>Trails</b>			
Walking/Hiking	1/region	0.4 mile/1,000	2 mile/1,000
Equestrian	N/A	0.4 mile/1,000	0.4 mile/1,000
Camping	N/A	2.5 sites/1,000	2.5 sites/1,000
Archery Area	1/50,000	1/50,000	1/50,000
<b>Specialized</b>			
Community Center	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Golf Course	1/25,000	1/20,000	1/20,000
Bicycling (Urban)	N/A	1/25,000	1/25,000
Auditorium	1/20,000	N/A	N/A
<b>Canoeing/Boating</b>			
Streams/Lakes	N/A	0.2 mile/1,000	0.2 mile/1,000
Stream/Lake Access	N/A	1/10 miles	1/10 miles

Where Burke County standards deviate from the state and national standards, current demands on Park and Recreation programs have been taken into account.



**Table 2: EXISTING AND RECOMMENDED PUBLIC FACILITIES**

Facility	Burke County Standard (Recommended)	Existing County Owned Facilities	Existing Facilities offered by other municipalities	Existing County Owned School Facilities	Current Demand (90,723 estimate)	10-Year Demand (92,730 estimate)
<b>Fields</b>						
Adult Baseball	1/5,000	7	18	12	18	19
Youth Baseball	1/5000	7	18	12	18	19
Softball	1/5,000	7	19	12	18	19
Football	1/20,000	3	1	12	5	5
Soccer	1/20,000	3	5	12	5	5
<b>Outdoor Courts</b>						
Basketball	1/5,000	2	5	4	18	19
Tennis	1/2,000	1	13	24	45	46
Volleyball	1/5,000	0	4	0	18	19
Shuffleboard	1/5000	0	2	0	18	19
Horseshoe	1/5000	0	5	0	18	19
<b>Outdoor Areas</b>						
Picnic Shelter	1/3,000	4	28	0	30	31
Playgrounds	1/3,000	4	13	13	30	31
Amphitheater	1/20,000	1	0	0	5	5
<b>Trails</b>						
Walking/Hiking	0.4 mile/1,000	2 mi.	*	1.25 mi	36 mi.	37
Equestrian	0.4 mile/1,000	NA	NA	NA	36 mi.	37
Camping	2.5sites/1,000	NA	***	NA	227	232
Archery Area	1/50,000	NA	NA	NA	1	1
<b>Specialized</b>						
Community Center	1/20,000	0	2	NA	5	5
Swimming Pool	1/20,000	0	3	NA	5	5
Golf Course	1/20,000	NA	NA	NA	5	5
Bicycling (Urban)	1 mi./25,000	NA	NA	NA	4	4
Auditorium	N/A	1	2	6	NA	NA
<b>Canoeing/Boating</b>						
Streams/Lakes	0.2 mile/1,000	1.25	**	NA	18 mi.	18.6 mi.
Stream/Lake Access	1/10 miles	1/10	**	NA	1/10	1/10

\* The number of trails offered by local municipalities, the National Forests Service and State owned parks, forest and game lands totals into the hundreds of miles.

\*\* The number of streams, lakes and shoreline in Burke County available to the public is high.

\*\*\* The National and State recreational areas provide ample camping opportunities for Burke County residents.

From this exercise, we have concluded that Burke County is in need of some additional recreational facilities such as walking/hiking trails, camping sites, etc. However, these facilities are provided for in great abundance through other local municipalities, State and Federally owned lands within County boundaries. Those recreational facilities in need that are not offered by other municipalities include: Basketball (-7) and Tennis Courts (-7), Volleyball (-14) and Shuffleboard Courts (-16), Horseshoe pits (-13), Amphitheaters (-4), Community Centers (-3) and, Swimming Pools (-2).



At this time other athletic facilities where the current need is being met, depend on the continued cooperation of Burke County Schools. Baseball/softball, football, gyms for indoor soccer and basketball games, and soccer fields are in high demand by both the



County Schools and Burke County Parks and Recreation Department. It should be noted that County Recreation staff have expressed a dire need for additional football/soccer fields and indoor basketball courts due to the growing basketball, indoor/outdoor soccer and football programs in the County. Scheduling and managing these programs has become difficult with limited facilities and staff. County staff has relies on volunteers to meet the basic needs of the County athletic programs.

*County Parks & Recreation Department recognizes the immediate need for soccer & football fields and basketball facilities.*

At the time of this Parks and Recreation study, Burke County was considering the closure of some County schools and consolidation of those displaced populations into larger, newer schools. No definitive decision has been



made as to which and how many schools will be closed or where and how many new schools will be constructed. As school facilities with athletic facilities are closed, the County should provide athletic facilities to meet the future projected demand of both the new school and the Parks and Recreation Department. By doing so would be more efficient than building new athletic facilities for the school and separate facilities to meet the needs of Parks and Recreation. The previous chart and the chart below provide existing and future short falls for the Parks and Recreation Department but does not include any potential short falls due to the closing of school based recreation facilities. Once County officials have decided how which schools will be closed then a re-evaluation of the available athletic fields and courts should be made.



To summarize, existing and future short falls are listed below. These results are based on NRPA, NCDENR and Burke County recreation standards.

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Current Short Fall</b>	<b>Future Short Fall 2024 Needs</b>
Amphitheater	4	4
Horseshoe Pits	13	14
Softball	0	0
Tennis	7	7
Volleyball	14	15
Shuffleboard	16	17
Playground Facilities	0	1
Swimming Pools	2	2

- END OF SECTION -



## **SECTION 5 GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

As identified in the inventory portion of this report (Section 3), there are five separate, existing recreational facilities owned and operated by Burke County. These facilities offer both active and passive recreation opportunities. The County Recreation Department also cooperates with County Schools for the use of ball fields for sports programming. The Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan serves as a map for the future development of recreation facilities in Burke County. The plan incorporates recommendations to accomplish the objectives set forth in the Master Plan. These recommendations are divided into the following categories:

- Roles of Burke County Providers
- Roles of other Recreation Providers
- Park Proposals and Recommendations
- Facility Proposals and Recommendations
- Priorities for Development



### **5.2 ROLES OF BURKE COUNTY**

Burke County should continue to offer recreational opportunities at existing parks and support the development of future parks and greenway trails for local residents and visitors alike. This plan acknowledges the potential role that the County sustainable eco/adventure tourism could play in expanding recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. However, the development of a strategy to capitalize on the vast public recreational opportunities within the County should be carefully crafted by the County and involve the cooperation of all County departments.



*Recreation facilities and programs should be shared responsibility among providers*

To avoid overextending their staff, the County needs to continue to investigate partnerships with other recreation providers and community groups. Currently the County does partner with a number of area recreation providers. These partnerships should be further developed and new partnership possibilities explored, especially with the proposed addition of new parks and greenways to the park system.



## 5.3 ROLES OF OTHER RECREATION PROVIDERS

### Town of Morganton

Town of Morganton plays a prominent role in providing recreation opportunities to all County residents. Future development of the Morganton Greenway should be encouraged to tie the proposed Burke County greenway trails such as the Lake James Loop Trail. Such connectivity would provide all residents within the County an important pedestrian transportation and recreational resource. Some possible destination points would include residential areas, schools, parks, medical facilities and retail areas.

The Morganton Parks and Recreation Department has an ample number of facilities and programs that local residents currently use and enjoy. Possible shared programming of athletic facilities and maintenance between Burke facilities and Morganton's may provide opportunities for area athletic leagues to expand team sports activities such as attracting tournaments.



### Town of Hildebran

The Hildebran Parks Department has facilities that local residents are just beginning to recognize. Hildebran offers a number of nice spaces that the community may schedule to rent. Possible shared programming and maintenance of Hildebran's facilities

would provide more exposure for those recreation facilities and give the County a way to provide more flexible scheduling of future events requiring such meeting spaces.

### Town of Valdese

The Town of Valdese plays a prominent role in providing recreation opportunities to all County residents. Valdese should be encouraged to develop future greenways that tie into proposed Burke County greenway trails and to neighboring communities' trails.



Valdese offers a number of recreation facilities for County residents to rent. Possible shared programming and maintenance of the Valdese facilities would expand the County's offerings and possibly help those facilities generate more revenue for Valdese.



*Waldensian Trail of Faith*



*Huffman Center offers programs*

### **Town of Drexel**

In 2013 Drexel took responsibility for providing recreation programming at the R.O. Huffman Center. Prior to this The Drexel Foundation sub-leased the facility to the County.

This recreational facility is an important hub for many County residents and should continue to be special resource. The Drexel Recreation Department should be encouraged to partner with the County with regards to providing opportunities to share programming of its facilities.

### **Towns of Connelly Springs, Glen Alpine, & Rutherford College**

The Towns of Connelly Springs, Glen Alpine and Rutherford College rely on Burke County for recreation facilities and programming.



*Rutherford College Fall Festival*

### **Burke County Schools**

Burke County Parks and Recreation should continue to develop their working relationship with the County School System for the shared use of athletic fields, indoor facilities, and possible maintenance work. This relationship is mutually beneficial, and should be strengthened and expanded to include any new school facilities that arise out of the current movement to possibly consolidate County schools. Periodic evaluation will allow for any arrangements to be adjusted; thereby maintaining the current needs of both organizations.





## **Private Sector**

### **Developers**

The private sector is an important component for Burke in providing resources and opportunities for the County's parks. Developers can assist Burke by the dedication, construction and/or reservation of future park sites, open space and/or greenway corridors during the overall development process. A Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) allows for the dedication of easements for greenway corridors as private property is developed. The requirements would allow the County to have funds for developing future park facilities.



*Dedicated lands may be otherwise uninhabitable by public*

In many cases, the land offered for dedication by a developer may be in areas where a developer would not place buildings. In addition, the location of the dedicated land offered may not be suitable for Burke County's long term goals for future park facilities. The County should introduce a parkland dedication requirement in order to produce potential park sites that meet the goals and objectives for the Parks Department while granting credit for open space dedications. Also, developers still need to provide payment in lieu of dedication when the property does not reflect the proposals and recommendations set in the master plan or park and greenway development.

### **Private Residential Developers**

A Unified Development Ordinance would provide a mechanism for Developers to provide land for parks, sidewalks, trails, greenways, recreational, and open space purposes. All major residential conventional subdivisions must dedicate land or fee in-lieu of land for open space. By establishing this regulation, the County can apply subject monies from the fee



*Ordinances can require open space development*

in-lieu of for the dedication or reservation of future park sites and/or open space, which contributes more to a community rather than a development.



## 5.4 PARK PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Burke County wants to be the main provider of active and passive recreation for Burke County residents. The County Park is the cornerstone of recreational opportunities for the residents of Burke and should continue to be developed to further provide for their recreational needs. The expansion of park and open space lands would go far in developing recreation opportunities for local residents.

### General Recommendations



*Playground has wheelchair accessibility*

#### **Recommendation #1: Facility and Program Accessibility**

*Every park and recreation facility Burke County operates should respect and provide for the needs of the disabled through design and programming. All new facilities should be designed to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. When existing and new facilities are acquired or developed,*

*priority should be given to the continual upgrading of facilities that, perhaps, may have become or are not ADA compliant. All existing County facilities should be assessed for safety and accessibility and a strategy to make necessary upgrades should be devised and implemented.*

#### **Recommendation #2: Design and Daily Maintenance**

*The facilities owned and operated by Burke County Parks and Recreation Department should be inviting places for residents of the County and visitors to the area. Priority should be given to improving the design of facilities such that they are architecturally and functionally progressive. Daily maintenance practices should be implemented to improve the cleanliness and longevity of all facilities. Master planning should always be completed for park improvements or new facilities prior to final budgeting and design; thereby, making the phasing/development more transitional and of higher quality.*



*Facilities must be kept functional and clean*



### Recommendation #3: Greenways/Multi-use Trails



Study shows demand for more greenways

Based on state and national studies, walking and biking are highly desired activities. The community surveys also indicated the local demand for these facilities, with a majority of the respondents favoring the development of greenways. The County should explore the feasibility of initiating a study of pedestrian and bicycle corridors and greenway trails to various destination points within the County. Such a plan would

require the inventory of existing, future, and proposed pedestrian/bicycle trails within the County and provide a guide for needed accessibility and safety improvements for new trails. A pedestrian plan study would help to identify and prioritize projects for the next 10-20 years.

### Recommendation #4: Bike Lanes

Given the high cost of fuel for vehicular transportation, air quality concerns and the need to increase the health/fitness of the population, a planned network of bike trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways should be developed to support alternative transportation to recreation facilities and travel within Burke County. All future, new



Shared roadway

roadway construction within the County should include provisions to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. This network should connect both existing, as well as future park facilities and greenways. In addition, bike racks (sheltered at schools and other potential high-use areas) should be installed at all publicly owned facilities across the County.



Wayfinding signage

### Recommendation #5: Way-finding

Burke County should consider the implementation of a uniform system of directional signage for all existing and proposed parks and future greenways. Such a system of signage would direct users to recreation facilities, public parking and significant destinations. A uniform system of signs will allow users to immediately recognize County Recreation and Park facilities from among the plethora of other directional



signage on roadways. The City of Morganton has already installed 20 wayfinding and 23 parking signs to help those having trouble navigating to local attractions (see illustration). The County should also develop one unifying system of wayfinding signage that would lead visitors to various recreational, civic, retail, and residential destinations; and, help with directions once they have arrived at the venue

### **Recommendation #6: Connectivity**

Continue to link the park system with greenways/trails and tie them into the major floodplain/open space system where applicable through fee simple donation or conservation easements where possible.

### **Recommendation #7: Intergovernmental Coordination**

Burke County Parks and Recreation should continue to coordinate planning efforts with other County departments such as the Burke County Department of Education and other local municipalities to provide additional greenway and park facilities and pedestrian connectivity. Representatives of the County and of these agencies should meet periodically to discuss development and recreation projects that are planned or are underway within the County. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss upcoming project opportunities and development trends in demographics and growth, newly identified citizen needs in recreation and open space, and recreation master plant updates, local municipalities, and adjacent counties. This will also insure that redundancy in services is prevented and all opportunities for partnerships and connectivity are being utilized. Utilizing the Western Piedmont Council of Governments would be an effective tool within the County as well as with neighboring counties. The WPCOG is a regional planning organization which serves 28 local governments in a four-county area of western North Carolina. Members include Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties and the 24 cities and towns within those counties.



### **Recommendation #8: Partnership Agreement**

It is recommended that the County Staff meet with existing and potential partners to determine needs and possible partnership opportunities. Potential (or existing partners) include schools, churches, local chamber of commerce, individuals, organizations, other municipalities, etc. The County should begin this process by developing an approach to each potential partner to establish an understanding of each entity's needs; and ultimately, result in a partnership agreement. The process will require periodic progress





meetings with each partner to facilitate the partnerships goals and objectives. This may entail presentations to the partner's board or committee.

### **Recommendation #9: Developers**

The County should strongly encourage or require developers to provide connectivity between developments and public facilities - such as parks, schools, and other pedestrian facilities. The inclusion of public greenways or trails in private developments should also be encouraged. If no suitable land for park or greenway development is available, the County should allow developers to pay into the fee-in-lieu of parkland dedication.



### **Recommendation #10: Interpretative Signage**

Burke County should consider placing signage that would identify any historic and natural landmarks along greenway corridors. This type of signage would not only enhance the pedestrian experience; but also, provide educational and cultural information to greenway users; i.e., on the Fonta Flora Loop Trail.

### **Recommendation #11: Educational and Stewardship Programming**

Burke County should develop a consistent environmental education program and interpretative facilities at park locations and along future greenway corridors as opportunities arise for future park development. These programs should include stewardship and community volunteer programs geared to the management of natural areas and wildlife habitats.

### **Recommendation #12: Green Building**

It is recommended that the Parks and Recreation Department implement green building components into the existing and future parks facilities. Green building techniques consist of building materials and construction practices which reduce environmental impacts (green-house gases, water pollution, and air pollution) and promote energy efficient building materials/methods. These efforts will improve environmental stewardship for park facilities and also educate park users.





### **Recommendation #13: Contiguous Property Acquisition**

*As property that is contiguous to existing parks becomes available, reasonable efforts should be made to assess the benefits and costs associated with the acquisition of the property. Large acreage parks offer recreation amenities that can only be achieved on large sites. The acquisition of contiguous property next to County Parks should be of high priority to Burke County. Efforts should be made immediately to seek first option on all contiguous properties. At the time these options are sought, other possibilities should be presented to the property owner as well. Some property owners may be receptive to conservation easements while retaining the title to the property. Conservation easements will allow the County the opportunity to use properties for recreation while providing the immediate benefits of preservation. Numerous grant sources can be used for land acquisition. Extreme care should be exercised in choosing the correct process(es) and timing for acquisition to meet the full potential afforded by grants.*

### **Recommendation #14: Acceptance of Fee Simple Land Donation**

*If land is offered to Burke County as donation by fee simple title with no restrictions, the property should be surveyed for natural heritage significance and relationship to existing plans and parks. If the land contains no environmental hazards, restrictive covenants, or restrictive easements, it can be useful and beneficial for the County to assume*



*Land donations should be accepted by Burke County for possible future use*

*ownership. Not all donated land has to be developed into a park in order to be useful. Any land donation to the County serves a great public need even if it is banked for the future, because the development and public needs of the distant future (over 50 years) is unknown. If donated property were properly managed, the revenue and future significance of the property would far exceed its current contribution to the tax base. If the County chooses not to accept land donation of a particular property, efforts should be made to assist the property owner with contacting an agency that accepts land donations or conservation easements.*

### **Recommendation #15: Natural and Cultural Heritage Inventory**



*Burke County should encourage the preparation of an Inventory of Significant Natural and Cultural Areas within the County. The intent of such a study would be*



to identify areas deemed to be significant natural and/or cultural resources, which should be evaluated for consideration of preservation. Such an inventory aids in the design and planning of future greenways by serving to highlight potential nodal destinations and would help to identify the unspoiled natural resources that could become destinations for eco-adventure tourism. Such information also may aid in the procurement of financial assistance for trail development.

### **Recommendation #16: Funding**

Consider property assessments and grantsmanship to fund greenway construction where the need for pedestrian connections cannot rely on the timing of private property development.



### **Recommendation #17: Walkability**

Promote land uses and site designs that make walking convenient, safe, and accessible for all ability levels to enjoy.

*Facility improvements or new construction should benefit all ages and ability levels*



### **Recommendation #18: Easements**

Encourage the coordination and planning for future utility easements with greenway facilities. The easements should be established to allow for the inclusion of recreation facilities.

### **Recommendation #19: Develop a marketing strategy and sustainable tourism model**

Burke County should create a task force to come up with how to promote the County's existing (public) natural resources to the eco-adventure tourism market.



## **Existing Park Recommendations**

### **Reep Park**

1. Lighting should be updated at the smaller fields and picnic shelter
2. Review the need for a press-box atop the existing restroom/concession building.
3. Parking should be expanded to allow for the potential of tournament play.
4. All park amenities should be assessed for compliance to A.D.A. standards.
5. Maintenance should occur on an ongoing basis
6. Proposed expansion of baseball fields, campsites, wildlife observation area and cross-country trail should be implemented following the existing plans.

### **Spring Park**

1. Parking lot lighting should be addressed.
2. Lighting at playground and restroom should be updated.
3. All facilities should be assessed for A.D.A. compliance.
4. Maintenance should occur on an ongoing basis.



### **Simpson Park**

This facility serves to provide multiple recreation opportunities which could draw large groups to the park at one time. This leads to the need for parking expansion and improvements to existing parking areas. While some efforts have been made to accommodate A.D.A. compliance, further assessment of the accessibility

of the individual park amenities should occur and needed improvements implemented. Other improvements include:

1. Lighting the basketball court and multi-use/soccer field
2. Upgrading the restrooms
3. Add way-finding signage leading into the park
4. All park amenities should be assessed for A.D.A. compliance
5. Maintenance should occur on an ongoing basis



## Parker Road Park

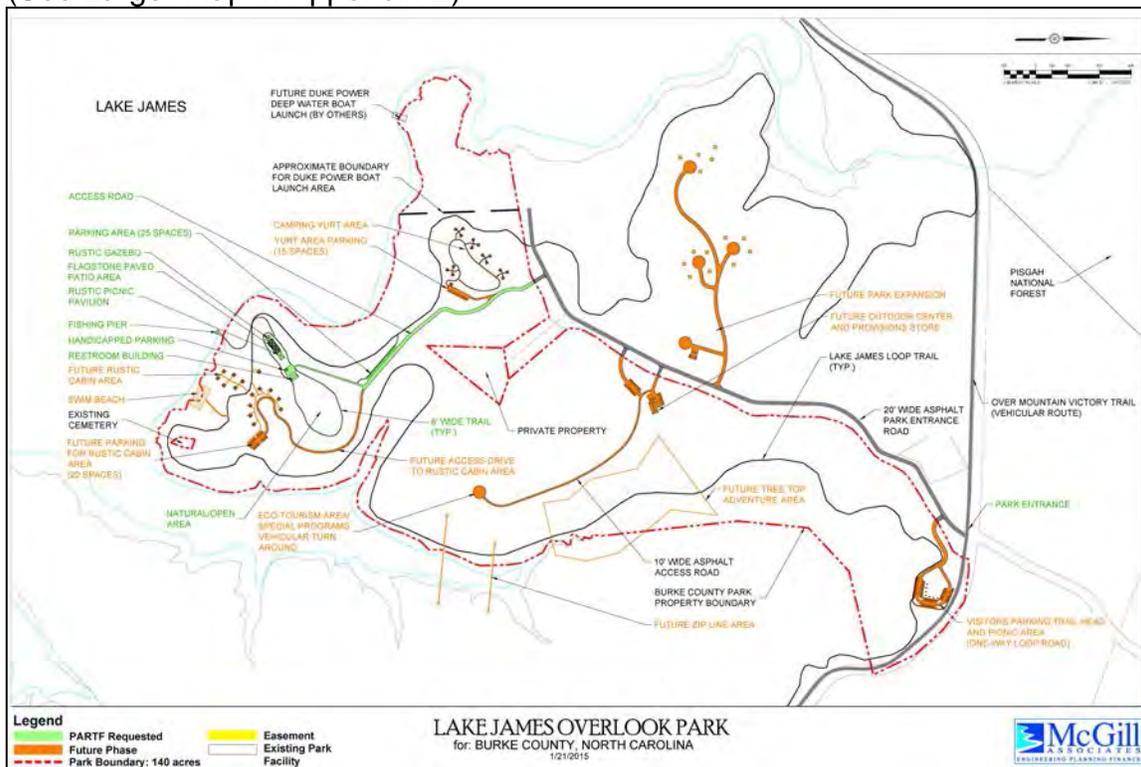
This facility has the potential to be a very nice park. However, renovations to all the park amenities are needed. It is recommended to undergo a study and collect public input as part of a master plan aimed at enhancing this recreation resource.

1. The restrooms, trails, playground, and picnic areas, etc., should be accessed for A.D.A. compliance and upgraded as needed.
2. Parking for this facility should be better designated
3. Way-finding signage leading to the park is needed.
4. Repair broken fencing.
5. Re-evaluate the need for public grills.
6. Maintenance should occur on an ongoing basis



*Re-evaluate need for grills*

## Future Burke County Park on Lake James (See Larger Map in Appendix E)



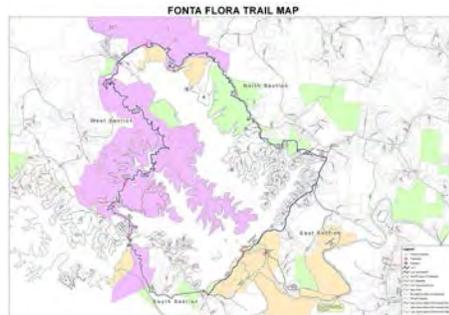
1. Develop a Master Plan for the property to inventory assets and identify potential for recreation programming.
2. Recognize the potential for the property to serve as an Eco/adventure tourism visitor center.



3. Provide pedestrian and vehicular connectivity to other destinations within the County.
4. Parking layout should allow for future expansion as needed.
5. All park amenities should be assessed for A.D.A. compliance

### **Fonta Flora Loop Trail**

The Fonta Flora Loop Trail Master Plan (2014) provides a guide to provide pedestrians and bicyclists of all abilities a safe and legal route to circumnavigate Lake James within Burke County.



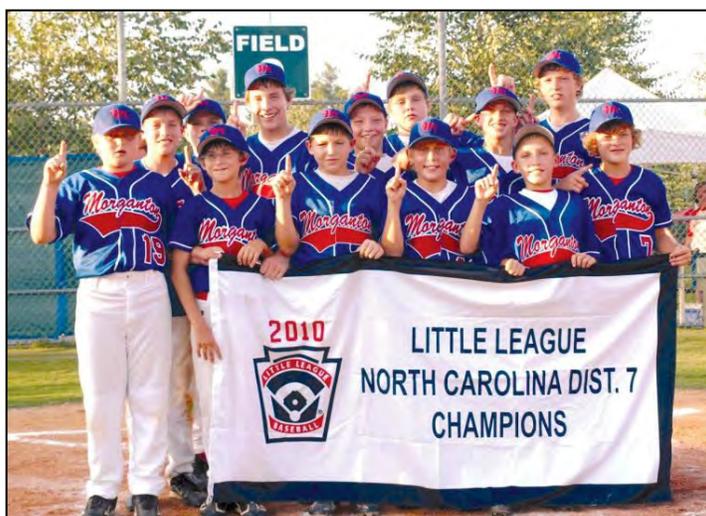
It is recommended that the County continue to follow the guidance laid out in the Plan as this effort can provide a variety of opportunities for local residents and visitors; and promote tourism and low infrastructure economic development within Burke County and the surrounding region.

*Trail will circumnavigate Lake James in County*

### **Old Burke County Courthouse, George Hildebrand Athletic Facilities, and Mull Athletic Facilities**

1. All recreation amenities should be assessed for A.D.A. compliance
2. Maintenance should occur on an ongoing basis

## **5.5 EXISTING FACILITY PROPOSALS / RECOMMENDATIONS**



In Section 4, “Recreation Needs Assessment: Evaluation of Facility Needs”, specific facility needs were identified for Burke County’s recreation facilities by both the recreation guidelines set forth by the State of North Carolina and the community input process. This section summarizes the County’s needs for its existing/future facilities and

*Former little league baseball team won state championship held at Catawba Meadows Park Complex*

makes recommendations for activities to be considered in the future development



of its park system.

## **Adult/Youth Baseball**

Currently, Burke County meets its current need for adult and youth baseball fields. It is recommended however, that additional adult and youth baseball fields be developed to ease the ability of leagues to host tournament play. If the County decides to close schools that provide ball fields then the County should in turn provide for the short fall at a new facility.

## **Softball**

Currently, Burke County meets its current need for softball fields. It is recommended however, that additional fields be developed to ease the ability of leagues to host tournament play. Again, if the County decides to close schools that provide ball fields then the County should in turn provide for the short fall at a new facility.

## **Football**

Currently, Burke County meets its need for football fields. If the County decides to close schools that serve to host Recreation Department programming then the County should in turn provide for the short fall at a new facility.



## **Soccer**

Soccer has become a very popular sport among youth in this country and it is a growing trend among young adults. Currently, Burke County meets its need for soccer fields. Again if the County decides to



close schools that serve to host Recreation Department programming then the

County should in turn provide for the short fall at a new facility.

*Softball, football, and soccer fields suffice with the use of the county schools facilities*

*More tennis courts are needed, but are not a priority at this time.*

## **Tennis Courts**

Currently, Burke County does not meet its need for tennis courts. However, there is not a sufficient demand for new



Tennis Courts at this time. The need for additional Tennis courts should be periodically re-evaluated to determine if and when new courts should be constructed.

## **Picnic Shelters and Tables**

While full picnic facilities are not needed at every park in the future system, it is suggested that either benches or picnic tables be placed in each existing and future park. New or remodeled picnic shelters, restrooms and activity areas should be built in the following parks:

1. Parker Road Park
2. Simpson Field



*Parks need playgrounds, picnic tables*

## **Playground Activities**

According to recreation standards, Burke will need one more public playground by 2024 at current population growth rates. Playground equipment should be installed near most picnic areas in the park system.

## **Walking /Hiking Trails and Urban Bikeways**



Currently, the majority of available trails and bikeways are provided by the State or via the Pisgah National Forest. Limited urban bikeways and greenways are made available via local municipalities; however, connectivity from one town to another is lacking. The County's existing and future parks need to be integrated into a county-wide pathway system that links area towns and public lands. Existing and future parks would serve as natural

*Bikeways should connect municipalities and other points of interest throughout Burke County*

destination points, resting stops, and trail heads. Such a connected system would ideally be a partnership between Burke County Parks and Recreation, Tourism, local municipalities, and the State of North Carolina. A well-conceived and jointly managed system of trails and bikeways would support a burgeoning eco/adventure tourism market and provide positive economic impact for the whole county.



## **Staffing and Maintenance**

This Master Plan covers a planning period of 20 years. The facilities to be implemented during that time as part of the recommendations will require some level of additional staffing and additional funding for facility operation and maintenance. Consideration of these budgetary impacts should be made prior to facility implementation.

Multiple factors may come to influence what the future staffing needs of the Burke County Parks and Recreation Department in the future. Those may include population growth, available tax dollars, Capital Improvement Plans, consolidation of public school facilities, development of eco/adventure tourism efforts, etc.

The Burke County Park and Recreation Department's structure and number of personnel are far below that of fairly comparably sized communities in the state. For a population in excess of 90,000 citizens there are only (6) six full time employees. The strain of the maintenance and care of Burke County's public park facilities, the management of recreation programs, and the day to day running of a County-wide Recreation Department, is higher than it should be. The County should re-evaluate its commitment to public



*Updates will require more staff, maintenance, and additional programs and equipment*

recreation and allocate funds necessary to properly staff the Burke County Parks and Recreation Department as demand for its services will continue to grow for the next 20 years. Increasing funding for Parks and Recreation facilities and programs will be necessary to foster a good quality of life for County residents, and prospective businesses that may seek to relocate to Burke County.

### **Staffing Levels for (2014-2015) budget year:**

#### **Full-time Positions**

- Director of Parks and Recreation (1)
- Athletic Program Supervisor (1)
- Recreation Program Coordinator (1)
- Maintenance Supervisor (1)
- Maintenance Workers (2)



## Part-time Positions

- Concession Supervisor (1) (eliminated in the 2013-14 budget)
- Concession Workers/gate keepers (10) (Only work as needed per event)
- Maintenance Workers (2) (Only work as needed - Average 10hrs./week)
- Score Keepers (contracted service)



*Full and part-time positions will be needed*

## 5.6 PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The park facility prioritization is an essential tool that provides Burke County's Parks and Recreation Department with a breakdown of the priority for each capital improvement. Given the magnitude of the budgets for improvements to existing parks and for potential new park and greenway facilities, prioritization of these needs is clearly important. The following is a list of priorities based upon the needs assessment process.

### Top Priority Projects

1. All existing County owned park facilities should have A.D.A. accessible parking areas, sidewalks, and connections to the various park amenities.
2. Establish a Capital Improvements Plan addressing the required staffing and maintenance of existing parks.
3. Repair lighting at all County owned recreation facilities.
4. Begin the process of developing a Master Plan for the Future Park at the Duke Property on Lake James.
5. Begin or continue phased construction of the Fonta Flora Loop Trail and Future Park at the Fish Hatchery Road on Lake James.
6. Begin working with local municipalities to establish and/or acquire easements for pedestrian connectivity to significant natural destinations in the County.

**- END OF SECTION -**



## **SECTION 6**

## **ECO/ADVENTURE TOURISM ASSETS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Tourism is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. It accounts for about 9% of the world's GDP and employs about 11.5% of the world's workforce. Last year international visits topped 1 billion for the first time and projections are that it will hit 1.8 billion by 2030.



*Burke County's variety of natural resources makes area a certain venue for tourists*

Within the tourism industry, ecotourism is the fastest growing segment. This growth has caught the attention of many. For example, Walt Disney Company is currently constructing a 1,730-unit ecotourism resort that will use nothing but renewable energy; send zero waste to landfills; not use any water from the aquifers; and leave 90% of the resort as green space.

Ecotourism is a growing segment of the global tourism industry that is making significant positive contributions to the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of destinations and local communities around the world. Offering market-linked long-term solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of rural places, worldwide. By increasing capacity building opportunities, ecotourism is also an effective vehicle for empowering local communities such as Burke County and others around the world to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Ecotourism is a tool that provides opportunities - a financially viable tool that provides sustainable solutions to economic challenges and conservation needs of local people; an alternative means of supporting rural economies to help revitalize and sustain local heritage; and a market-linked force connecting and empowering stakeholders. Also, ecotourism provides the traveler with unique opportunities to gain authentic experiences, discover new places, make new friends, and have a fun, memorable time. Eco-traveling can be much more than just taking only pictures and leaving only footprints; it's an opportunity for visitors to make a difference and to make a lasting impact on the communities and destinations they visit.



## Burke County Natural Assets and Possible Ecotourism Attractions (See section 3 for additional recreation facilities)

Burke County has an existing ecotourism base in its many natural outdoor assets, including, but not limited to:

**National Parks:** (Nearby) Blue Ridge Parkway offers views of Hawksbill, Grandfather Mountain, and Mt. Mitchell

**State Parks:** South Mountains and Lake James

**State Game Lands:** South Mountains Game Lands, Johns River Game Lands, and Linville Gorge Lands

**Trails:** Fonta Flora Loop Trail (under construction), Over Mountain Victory, Mountains to Sea, and various trails associated with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

**Rivers:** Catawba, Henry, and Linville

**Waterfalls:** Duggers, High Shoals, Upper Creek

**Bird Migration:** Osprey, Falcons, Warblers, Orioles, etc.

**Other Nature based destinations:** Pisgah National Forest (multiple outdoor activities), Table Rock (trails, views, climbing and rappelling), Linville Gorge National Wilderness - Chimneys, Jonas Ridge, Linville Falls, Brown Mountain Lights, etc.

**County Parks:** Lake James County Park (Potential to serve as a centrally located hub for various eco-tourism excursions.)



*The Catawba River provides recreational opportunities in Burke County*

## 6.2 Travel Industry Experts

To better study the county's assets and potential to develop ecotourism, this study involved communication with its travel industry experts at three (3) prestigious associations: The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Sustainable Travel International (STI). The following paragraphs contain explanations of this explosive trend as well as excerpts from their conversations regarding the future of Burke County.



### 6.3 What is Ecotourism?

At first glance, “ecotourism” may seem like a great way to market a destination like Burke County. It is important when moving forward to remember that “ecotourism” has a very specific meaning and particular components – and savvy ecotourists looking for a destination that follows sustainable guidelines are quick to criticize (i.e. post negative reviews on TripAdvisor) if their expectations are not met.



Most people attempting to gain a true understanding of this segment of the travel industry look to the standard definition and guidelines agreed upon by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990: “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”

Another accepted definition comes from The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO): “All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.”

To better understand the activities involved, it’s helpful to look at what it is that ecotourism does:

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- Minimizes environmental impact (by taking out only small groups, and by having locally owned tour operators)
- Builds environmental awareness (via education opportunities as well as interpretation features)





- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits (in the form of jobs) and empowerment (in the form of management of attractions and decision making ability) for local people
- Respects local culture

Thus, ecotourism supports tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment, with local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions. It provides conservation of biological and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection, minimizing tourism's own environmental impact and providing socio-economic benefits (jobs) to local populations, giving local communities the rights to informed consent and participation in the management of enterprises.

#### 6.4 What is Sustainable Tourism?



Executed correctly, ecotourism is one form of sustainable tourism: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." (UNWTO)

Brian Mullis, CEO and Founder of Sustainable Travel International (STI) said, "If I had a single question I think Burke County should ask themselves it would be: *'Do we have natural, cultural, and heritage assets we would like to promote and share with visitors and can we do so in such a way that doesn't destroy them?'* "



STI provides a Sustainable Destination Toolkit that helps achieve:

- Increased competitiveness
- Improved tourism product offerings
- Protection of natural and cultural tourism assets
- Improved collaboration between government, tourism companies, and nonprofit organizations



- Destination alignment with internationally recognized criteria and indicators for sustainable destination management
- Collaboratively developed action agenda that yields measurable results and tangible impacts on people's lives
- Enhanced ability to measure and manage sustainability performance and track progress in sustainable tourism over time

Working with TIES, STI, ATTA, UNWTO and more, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council has developed special Criteria for Destinations that:

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations that want to become more sustainable
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations
- Make it easier for media to recognize destinations and inform the public regarding their sustainability

## 6.5 Adventure Travel

Another type of tourism that is a form of sustainable tourism is adventure travel, a sector of the travel industry that is often successful for destinations with natural outdoor assets like those in Burke County, which offers hiking, climbing, equestrian activities, camping, fishing, hunting, and boating - among other adventure options. The value of the global outbound adventure travel sector is estimated at US \$263 billion, excluding airfare – a growth of 65% yearly since 2009.



Shannon Stowell, president Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), said, "Adventure travel is a sector of tourism increasingly recognized for attracting environmentally and culturally aware consumers and for its focus on responsible and sustainable development, a model designed to create economic opportunities for local people in rural and remote communities worldwide." Here are a few of the benefits of small adventure destinations becoming members of ATTA:

- Journalist Alerts: ATTA



facilitates relationships between journalists worldwide, in trade/industry and consumer print, broadcast and web-based mediums – both within the tourism industry and mainstream media by helping to pair them with the appropriate members based on specific media-driven queries.

- Industry Research: ATTA's state of the adventure travel industry research reports track customer demographics, customer interests, industry trends, and more.
- The HUB: Access for your organization's leadership to the ATTA Members only social networking website, 'TheHUB'.
- ATTA Regional events: Invitations to regional events and gatherings where members network, discuss, share, learn, innovate and grow.
- Special opportunities to work more deeply with the ATTA on programs such as AdventureEDU or AdventureWeek.



## 6.6 Local Partners

It is also important to work with local partners who, together, represent a big-picture perspective on the resources and their development history.

Early planning efforts aimed at developing eco-tourism in Burke County should include the following resources:

- Superintendents of both South Mountains and Lake James State Parks
- NC State Parks & Recreation's trails coordinator (already involved with plans for the Lake James Loop Trail)
- Superintendent of the National Park Service's Over Mountain Victory Trail (Morganton has been selected for the OVT's headquarters and the trail laces throughout Burke County)
- Someone from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission – probably Gordon Warburton – because Burke has several significant state game lands
- The USFS's Pisgah National Forest's Grandfather District Ranger
- Burke County Tourism Development Authority
- Parks and Recreation and Planning Departments of Burke County
- Chamber of Commerce
- Local businesses, and hunting/fishing guides



Susie Hamrick Jones, Executive Director, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, says, “The public lands and waters in Burke are the foundation for any ecotourism or ‘natural’ tourism pitch, and these people, along with our land trust, are going to be the most knowledgeable sources of information and most likely partners.”

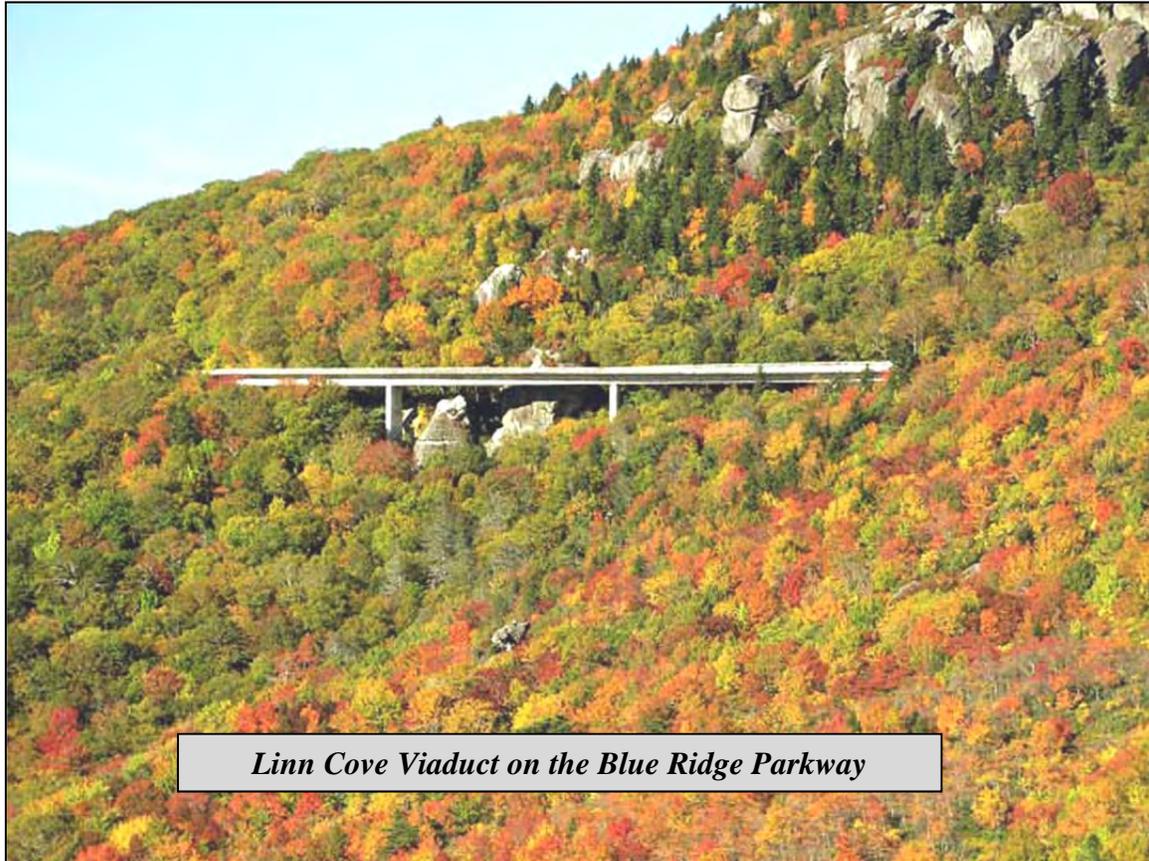
## 6.7 Burke County’s Future

Dr. Kelly Bricker, Professor and Dept. Chair, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, University of Utah; Chair, Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (TIES), says, “This area of North Carolina looks amazing! So much diversity, local culture, and beautiful environment—ecotourism seems like a no-brainer, as they have the sites, - and what appears to be - focus on nature, already in place.”

The possibility of developing eco-tourism within Burke County is real. There are existing natural destinations that visitors are already coming to see. With a well-conceived plan, properly placed marketing and cooperation between the local government and business community; eco-tourism can be promoted and grown into a thriving industry for residents in this County.

Economic development and impacts of eco-tourism are well founded and communities with the will to support this kind of sustainable industry can prosper. County leaders should look further into coordinating with neighboring partners and educate themselves on how eco-tourism can benefit the County and its residents. Burke County is already a part of the area Unifour – along with Catawba, Caldwell, and Alexander Counties; and, Morganton is a part of the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). As a way of generating interest in the existing natural attractions this County is fortunate enough to have - a marketing campaign should definitely be considered. A successful implantation of ecotourism will require financial and managerial investment by the County. The road to the future may be ecotourism for Burke County.





*Linn Cove Viaduct on the Blue Ridge Parkway*

Important goals in moving forward with development are to increase local education about ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and adventure travel. Only when the local people have a full understanding of these tourism opportunities can global marketing of these assets be effective.

The International Ecotourism Society's Communications Director and Education Programs Coordinator, Anita Ledford, is located a little over 30 miles from Morganton in upper Cleveland county. TIES would be open to providing workshop in Burke County to develop a vision together on what they would like to achieve, criteria for sustainable destination management/development, and marketing.

Recommendations for Burke County to augment the strategic assistance provided by McGill Associates are to:

- Conduct further research of current and potential tourism draws; interviewing of stake holders, business owners, community and environmental organizations and residents



- Join The International Ecotourism Society and The Adventure Travel Trade Association
- Allow TIES to work with Burke County one-on-one in a workshop capacity to develop a vision for ecotourism.
- Enlist the help of Sustainable Travel International to develop destination criteria and a sustainable development infrastructure for future tourism
- Use the knowledge from these associations to better education local constituents and plan for marketing of ecotourism, sustainable tourism and adventure travel.

### **Useful travel industry web sites:**

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)

Sustainable Travel International (STI) [www.sustainabletravel.org](http://www.sustainabletravel.org)

The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) [www.adventuretravel.biz](http://www.adventuretravel.biz)

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) [www.gstccouncil.org](http://www.gstccouncil.org)

Recreation within Burke County is enriched by its natural assets. With good leadership and a meaningful effort, these resources could be preserved and used as a starting point for sustainable eco/adventure tourism within Burke County.

**END OF SECTION**



## **SECTION 7** **Action Implementation Plan**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section describes how Burke County can implement a safe, convenient, and usable park and recreation system through the execution of its established goals in the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The strategy for achieving goals involves the recommended park, recreation, and greenway facilities/programs discussed in Section 5. Section 6 deals with strategies and opportunities, key implementation steps (implementation policies), necessary staffing, and methods for developing facilities. Together, these sections form the implementation program.

The results of Burke County Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan 2014-2034 are based on the following discovery methods: (1) a review of the study area that is within the County



*County Master Plan makes recommendations for both facilities and programming.*

limits, (2) an analysis of the existing parks and facilities; (3) community input; and (4) recreation standards that have been generically developed for municipalities and county governments. The Master Plan is designed to be action-oriented and serve as a tool in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for Burke County.

*Identification of sufficient funding* is a crucial element that is required to implement the Master Plan, considering in particular, the County budget constraints. The North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is a guide by which inadequate funding for park and recreation facilities may be identified. *Insufficient funding* will be a key issue that will need to be addressed in the upcoming years if governments continue to provide basic



minimum services. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina and its local governments are 33% below the national average in the funding of parks and recreation services.

To meet the existing and future needs of Burke County Parks and Recreation Department, the goals and objectives that are identified in the Master Plan, must be seriously considered for implementation. The County will need to continue to establish annual budgets for parks and recreation based on projected capital improvement costs, staffing needs, and operations/maintenance costs. The following Capital Improvements Plan is for the first 10-year period, 2014-2024, of the Master Plan recommendations and is broken into each fiscal year for implementation of specific projects.

## Park and Recreation Capital Expenditures

The population estimates used in this report were certified county and municipal estimates in July, 2012. The estimates were calculated by the State Demographer, Office of State Budget and Management and North Carolina Office of the Governor. The figures were provided online at <http://demog.state.nc.us>. The per capita expenditure figures are from the *North Carolina Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study, Fiscal Year 2011-2012*. County Per Capita Expenditures are provided here to provide a comparable perspective.

The following government entities represent North Carolina County Recreation Departments serving populations similar to that of Burke County.

**Table 7.1.1**

Recreation Providers with populations of 80,000 to 99,000	Population Estimate 2012	Per Capita Expenditure 2011-2012
Nash County	95,804	\$4.46
<b>Burke County</b>	<b>89,653</b>	<b>\$6.53</b>
Moore County	86,945	\$7.33

From the table above it is clear to see that there is some variation in the amount of per capita expenditure by counties of similar population size to Burke. Burke per capita expenditure is slightly higher than the average for Counties with similar populations (within a 10,000 persons of Burke County).

To meet the existing and future recreation needs of Burke County's population, the goals and objectives, which are identified in the Master Plan, must be seriously considered for implementation. The County will need to continue



establish annual budgets for its parks and recreation facilities based on projected capital improvement costs, staffing needs and operations/maintenance costs. The operating budget should include costs for staff, operations, and general maintenance requirements.

## 7.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

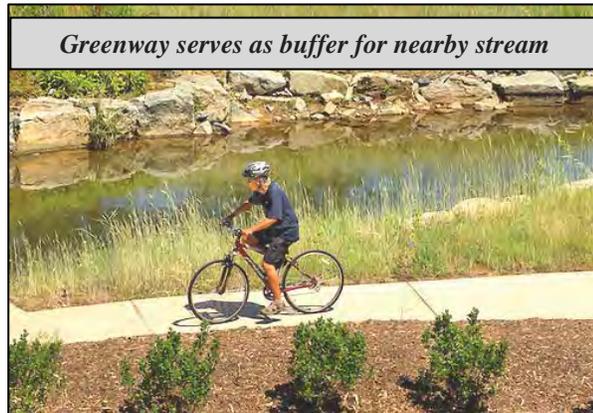
Studies have shown that economies are impacted *very positively* where bicycle and pedestrian tourism is fostered and promoted; and where investments are made in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The number of people who feel comfortable walking or riding bicycles is a measure of the quality of life in that area.



*Greenways increase the need for overnight lodging for visitors*

### Trails and Greenways

Trails and greenways are extremely popular amenities for vacationing bicyclists and pedestrians. Tourists and visitors to the area often return to communities that provide places (which are safely removed from busy roads) for walking and bicycling. One successful example of this is the Morganton Greenway. Trails offer scenic recreation, which is suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Many times, lodging is in close proximity to popular trails, thereby increasing occupancy for the owner. For residents in these locales, investments in trails and greenways can increase property values and improve the overall livability of a community, as well as attracting, retaining, and expanding tourism and the associated revenues.



*Greenway serves as buffer for nearby stream*

Greenways, as vegetated buffers located adjacent to waterways, act as “filters” to clean the water, trapping nonpoint source pollutants. These pollutants which include sediment, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, gas and other chemicals, are transported into streams, rivers, and/or lakes by stormwater when rain or snow events occur. Greenways, therefore, can reduce the need for expensive pre-treatment of the water supply by cleaning it before it reaches residents.



Investing dollars in greenways yield substantial community-wide returns. These returns are in the form of increased property values, business attraction, recreation revenue, and reduced water treatment and flooding costs. Not only are tourists attracted to these areas, but business leaders are selecting sites for the relocation and expansion of industries and corporations where the quality of life is high and recreation opportunities are abundant. Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the benefits of convenient fitness and recreation for their employees and are seeking these greenway amenities for potential locations.

## Trail Development

The ongoing construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities is proving to be a very wise economic investment for the communities through which they pass.

Trails and pathways have a positive effect on nearby property values with homebuyers and business owners realizing the effect that such facilities bring to a community. According to research by the *Rails to Trails Conservancy*, there are vast amounts of people, who are using rail trails. It is easy to understand how communities can profit economically by meeting the needs of trail users: restaurants, convenience stores, bicycle and other merchandise shops, campgrounds and alternate lodging.



*Converting abandoned rails to trails*

All of these types of entrepreneurs attribute the location of a nearby trail to at least a portion of their success. Realtors and homebuyers alike are recognizing the benefits of properties located near trails. Both locally and nationally, the construction of trails have proven to be a cost effective use of public funds. In particular, multi-use trails allow more visitors and residents to replace automobile trips with non-motorized trips, thereby moving the citizenry closer to achieving public health objectives, including increased opportunities for physical exercise.

## Parks

Research has substantiated the direct proportion between economic growth and the existence of parks and open space in communities and municipalities around the country. This growth includes increased property values in residential, urban, and industrial communities, as well as the increased revenue from tourists.



## Increased Property Value

The real estate market consistently demonstrates that residents throughout the country are willing to invest larger amounts of money in properties that are located close to parks and open space areas than they would for homes that do not offer these types of amenities. The higher values of these homes produce higher property taxes in the affected area. In some instances, additional property taxes are sufficient to recoup the annual debt charges on bonds, which were originally used to finance park acquisition and development.



*Proximity to parks attracts residential and commercial development*

Studies have also concluded that the positive relationship between park proximity and property value also holds true in low-income urban areas. In dense, urban neighborhoods, the value effect of nearby green space can be stronger than the resident's lot value, increasing the lot value and again, yielding higher property taxes, to, perhaps fund the cost of the park.

The values of commercial properties also increase when parks or outdoor facilities (such as outdoor festivals, movies, restaurants, etc.) are in the immediate locale. Studies indicate that "commercial asking rents" near park property exceed rents in surrounding submarkets.

## Tourism

A park often becomes the signature attraction for a community or municipality. It is often used as a marketing tool to attract residents, tourists, conventions, and businesses. Parks often shape the identity of the area and give residents a sense of pride.



*Parks attract residents & tourists*

Organized events held in public parks; arts festivals, athletic events, food festivals, concerts, plays, et cetera, often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities by filling hotel rooms and restaurants, and bringing customers to other local business enterprises.



Burke County is fortunate to have within its boundaries both State and Federal land that could serve to attract eco/adventure tourists. Burke County should develop trails, way-finding signage, parking areas, maps and marketing materials supporting the use of these existing public resources. The County should explore the potential economic impact that attracting visitors from outside the County to visit these destinations. The County Tourism and Recreation departments should coordinate efforts to initiate a plan aimed at promoting and developing the nature based tourism assets that are so richly abundant within Burke County's borders. Recent land acquisition of the Duke Energy property on Lake James may provide an excellent hub for eco/adventure based tourism efforts.

## **7.3 OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES**

### **Dedicated Source of Local Funding**

In order to leverage and provide matching funds for many of the programs listed above, Burke County should evaluate the existing departmental budget and funding for capital improvements to include the following:

- Property/sales tax
- Bonds
- Fee in-lieu of contributions
- User fees/registration fees

### **Property/Sales Tax Revenues**

General tax revenues traditionally provide sources for general operations and maintenance of park systems for local governments. The Parks and Recreation Department is scheduled along with health, public safety, utilities, et cetera. in regular budgets established by the County. Assessed valuation of real and personal property tax and sales tax provides the framework for the major portion of the tax base for the County.

Traditionally ad valorem tax revenue has been the primary source of funding for the park and recreation enhancement of properties/facilities owned by local governments, 'Recreational opportunities' are considered a public service and often are a standard line item on general fund budgets. Creative financial opportunities are possible; however, ad valorem taxes will continue to be the major revenue source to support the system. As such, communities often vote to raise their local tax rate temporarily in support of their park and recreation systems.



## **General Obligation Bonds**

Many communities issue bonds that are typically approved by the shareholders, to finance site development and land acquisition costs. The State of North Carolina grants local governments the authority to borrow funds for parks and recreation through the issuance of bonds. The amount is not to exceed the cost of acquisition or improvement of park and recreation facilities. Total bond capacities for local governments are



limited for parks and recreation, to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation. Since the issuance of bonds relies on the support of the voting population, the implementation of awareness programs is absolutely essential prior to a referendum vote.

General Obligation bonds are the preferred financing approach of the North Carolina Local Government Commission and the general securities market, because these instruments are backed by the full faith and credit of the issuer. That simply means that the bonds represent an encumbrance against the property tax base of the issuing jurisdiction and therefore offer the best available security to the bond holder. The State of North Carolina gives the issuance of bonds not to exceed the total cost of improvements (including land acquisition). In view of the recommended capital improvements suggested in this plan, borrowing of funds to develop new facilities may be necessary. Total bonding capacities for local government is limited for parks and recreation to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation.

The following are key factors to consider before using this financing instrument:

- In North Carolina, the issuance of General Obligation bonds requires a referendum of the voters within the issuing jurisdiction.
- The term of the debt may be extended to 20-30 years.
- The debt is publicly sold, so there are costs associated with the sale. These costs generally total 3% to 5% of the total bond principal. The issuance costs offset the lower interest rate and therefore, this instrument becomes more attractive as the size of the issuance increases and the issuance costs are spread over the larger debt. It has been found that this financing option becomes financially superior as the debt principal exceeds \$10-\$12 million.



- Generally, prepayment of the debt cannot be accomplished until reaching a call date. This usually is around 75% of debt retirement.

Failure of the General Obligation Bond to be ratified by referendum could mean that the County could not go forward with an alternative approach to financing without substantially changing the scope of the project

### **Fee in-lieu of contributions**

Under the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), developers would have an option to pay a 'fee in lieu of' rather than to dedicate land for open space or recreation within conventional subdivisions. This program has



*UDO provides 'fee in lieu of' purchase of open space and recreation amenities*

proven to be successful for many local governments in providing a dedicated source of revenue, earmarked for park development. The County may choose to revisit this source of revenue to study the feasibility of enhancing the fee in-lieu formula.

### **User fees/registration fees**



Communities throughout the nation employ a wide variety of user fees for public use of recreational programs and services within their recreation departments. The amount of the fee is usually determined by a portion of the recreation costs needed for improvements and operations. These user fees are typically levied for special facilities such as water parks and golf courses; however, they can also be charged for the use of trails and ball fields. Burke County should continue to generate revenue by charging user fees for use of facilities such as picnic shelters and the golf course in order to cover operation and administrative costs. As the park system continues develop, the County should examine their fee structure to identify opportunities for additional revenue. The current user fees appear to be fair and reasonable for a majority of the County residents. Elected officials should determine the fees and charges; the fees should not be so high that persons of modest income would ultimately be denied the use of park facilities.



## Other Sources of Funding

### Tournament Based Recreation

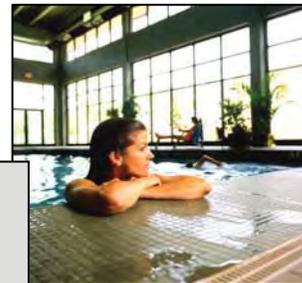
The demand for recreational facilities, which can host large sports tournaments, is prevalent across the state. Tournament-quality sports complexes emphasize the vital role sports play in our everyday lives and generate revenue through the hosting of local youth, adult, and senior competitions - by providing a venue for regional, state, and national sports league tournaments. Sports complexes also highlight the quality of life in a community and serve to attract visitors and prospective residents. Sports complexes support the development of local athletics, tournament events, sports leagues and organizations.



*Sports tournaments bring revenue to local economies*

A tangible benefit that sports complexes bring to their community is the generation of revenue from the hosting of tournaments. The local park and recreation department benefits financially from the rental of the facility, admission fees, parking, and concession fees. The local retail community benefits financially from the influx of visitors spending money at retail establishments, hotels and restaurants. Indirect economic impact on the community comes in the form of additional tax revenue from sales taxes.

The main goal of any sports complex is to maximize the economic benefits of sports for the betterment of the entire local community. By increasing the number of people exposed to the host community's visitor amenities (i.e. restaurants, hotels, gas stations, etc.) these businesses gain increased opportunities to earn profit. The increased tourism generated by the sports complex may also improve visitor exposure to other local area attractions. Sports complexes capable of hosting events that span a wide spectrum of sports and performance levels can maintain their economic impact potential by creating seasonal sports tourism for the community throughout the year.



*Indoor and/or outdoor sports complexes draw revenue to local economy and create jobs*





Sports complexes provide jobs in the form of public sector operations and maintenance staff. Operation of the facility can produce economic growth and private sector development and generate better statewide and regional exposure for the community.

The Rocky Mount Sports Complex is one example of how such a facility can produce a significant economic impact. This complex consists of a number of amenities including a championship baseball field, four softball/multi-purpose fields, and six youth ball fields with adjustable bases from 60'-70', two regulation basketball courts, ample lighting, and parking for 600 vehicles, restrooms and concession areas.

According to the *Rocky Mount, North Carolina 2006-2007 Rocky Mount Sports Complex Economic Impact Report for March 15th to July 1<sup>st</sup>*, there was an overall economic impact of \$2,242,000.00 from tournament events. These numbers reflect a total number of 12 tournament weekends with 220 total teams participating with an average attendance of 510 patrons per day. The dollar amount was based on \$40 a day spent for the average day tripper and \$100 a day spent by the average over-night visitor (Averages from *Raleigh Sports Data, Greater Raleigh Sports Council 2007*).

Following its opening in 2006, the Catawba Meadows Park in Morganton played host to a 93 team, regional little league baseball tournament. With five little league ball fields and four softball/baseball fields this complex has already won a state economic development award and helped Morganton become one of the state's largest tourism regions.

Recently, Morganton's Catawba Meadows Park hosted four larger scale youth tournaments. According to the 2006 Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan (a



Western Piedmont Council of Governments and the Unifour Recreation and Open Space Task Force report), the four tournaments generated about \$1.3 million in total economic activity. This amount is based on 60 teams with an average of 15 participants per team and 1.5 family members per team member. These tournaments occurred between

March and July and were organized by a number of different organizations including BPA Baseball, AFA Fast-pitch Softball, USSSA Baseball and Triple Crown Baseball.

The involvement of host clubs and organizations with regard to implementing and managing sports tournaments is crucial for the success of any sports complex. These groups can be regional, statewide, national, or even international; and



thus, could be an inexhaustible resource for encouraging sports tourists to visit any given sports complex.

According to the Travel Industry Association (TIA), sports events-related travel has increased significantly in America. In 2007, TIA reports that "...in the last five years, 75.3 million U.S. adults attended an organized sports event, competition, or tournament as either a spectator or as a participant while on a trip of 50 miles or more, one-way, or away from home." TIA also reports that a quarter of all sports events travelers attended events to watch their children or grandchildren play. Becoming part of this sports tourism market is possible by providing the sports tournament infrastructure necessary to attract this market. Therefore, having a successful sports complex can mean providing economic growth while attracting visitors and prospective residents to the community.

## **ECO/ADVENTURE TOURISM**

See Section 6 (Eco/Adventure Tourism and the Burke County Recreation Master Plan)

## **FUNDING/ACQUISITION SOURCES**

Implementing the recommendations of this Comprehensive Parks Master Plan will require a combination of funding sources that include local, state, federal and private money. This Section provides a listing of the most commonly used funds for park and greenway facility projects in North Carolina. Fortunately, the benefits of protected greenways and parks are many and varied. This allows programs in Burke County to access money earmarked for a variety of purposes including water quality, hazard mitigation, recreation, air quality, alternative transportation, wildlife protection, community health and economic development. Competition is always stiff for state and federal funds. It becomes imperative that local governments work together to create multi-jurisdictional partnerships and to develop their own local sources of funding. These sources can then be used to leverage outside assistance. The long term success of this plan will almost certainly depend on the dedication of local revenue stream for park and greenway projects.





It is important that Burke County fully evaluate its available options and develop a funding strategy that can meet community needs, maximize local resources, improve quality of life, and leverage outside funding. Financing will be needed to administer the continued planning and implementation process, acquire parcels or easements and manage and maintain facilities. Further research into these programs is recommended to determine requirements for specific grants.

McGill Associates advises Burke County to pursue a variety of funding options. Below is a list of park and greenway funding opportunities that communities typically seek. Creative planning and consistent monitoring of funding options will likely turn up new opportunities not listed here.

## Grants

State and federal agencies offer numerous grants to assist municipalities in the financing of their parks and recreation projects. This source of funding should definitely be investigated and pursued by Burke County for present and future park and recreation improvements.

### Federal Aid Construction Funds

These funds are included in the National Highway System (NHS) Surface Transportation Program (STP), and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). The funds provide for the construction of pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities. The primary source of funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is STP Enhancement Funding.

### North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program

The N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP) combines a wetlands-restoration initiative by the N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources with ongoing environmental efforts by the Dept. of Transportation to restore, enhance, and protect its wetlands and waterways. EEP provides:

- High-quality, cost-effective projects for watershed improvement and protection
- Compensation for unavoidable environmental impacts associated with transportation, infrastructure and economic development





- Detailed watershed-planning and project-implementation efforts within threatened or degraded watersheds of North Carolina.

### **The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act of 2004 (SAFETEA).**

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act of 2004 (SAFETEA), approved by the federal government in 2004, is a primary source for financing bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway projects throughout the country, at both the local and state levels. Providing as much as 80% for development and construction costs, this grant is earmarked for facilities such as sidewalks, rail-trails, bike-lanes and greenways. The Enhancement Program (a section of SAFETEA) is used primarily by municipalities since this section focuses on bicycle and pedestrian corridors, environmental mitigation, historic preservation and scenic byways. 20% matching funds are required by the applying entity and applicants must meet several other criteria as well. Prior to applying for this grant, a through engineering assessment should be performed to determine construction costs.

### **Recreation Trails Program**

The Recreation Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). RTP makes recreation funds available for state allocation to develop and maintain recreation trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreation trail users. RTP funds are distributed to states by a legislative formula: half of the funds are distributed equally among all states and half are distributed in proportion to the estimated amount of non-highway recreational fuel used in each state. (Non-highway recreational fuel is the type which is typically used by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-road motorcycles and off-road light trucks.)

### **Watershed Protection and Flood Protection**

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assists state and local governments in their operation and maintenance of watersheds whose areas are less than 250,000 square acres. The NRCS provides both financial and technical assistance to eligible projects for the improvement of watershed protection, flood prevention, sedimentation control, public water-based fish and wildlife enhancements and recreation



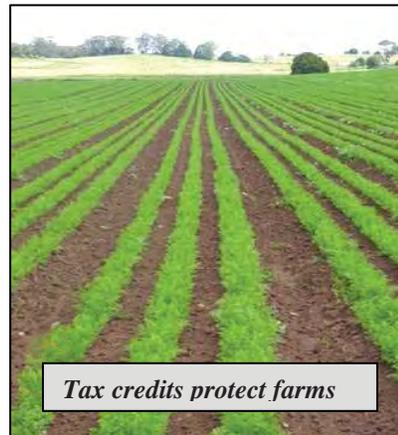
planning. The NRCS requires a 50% local match for public recreation and fish/wildlife projects.

### **State Construction Funds**

These funds (not including the Highway Trust Fund for Urban Loops and Interchanges) may be used for the construction of sidewalks and bicycle accommodations that are a part of roadway improvement projects.

### **The North Carolina Conservation Tax Credit**

This program provides an incentive (in the form of an income tax credit) for landowners that donate interests in real property for conservation purposes. Property donations can be fee simple or in the form of conservation easements or bargain sale. The goal of this program is to manage stormwater, protect water supply watersheds, and preserve working farms and forests, and set-aside greenways for ecological communities, public trails and wildlife corridors. For additional information, visit the website at <http://ncctc.enr.state.nc.us/>.



### **Farmland Protection Trust Fund**

Ranging from only a couple hundred thousand dollars to millions of dollars over the last several years, this program is funded through an allocation by the NC General Assembly to the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. It is a voluntary program designed to protect farmland from development by either acquiring property outright or acquiring conservation easements on the property. The program is administered by the Conservation Trust Fund for North Carolina (CTNC). Questions about available funding should be directed to CTNC.

### **Contributions**

The solicitation of contributions is an acceptable method of fund-raising for recreation departments. These donations, typically in the form of land, cash, labor, and/or materials, could be solicited to assist Burke County with its enhancement program. Corporations, civic organizations, individuals and other groups generally donate to a specific park project; however, donations may also



be solicited for multiple project improvements or additions. The National Recreation and Park Association recommend the use of private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt foundations as a means of accepting and administering private gifts to a public park system.

## **Park Foundations**

Foundations are another source of financing by making direct contributions within communities, states or the nation. These types of funds are usually described as special program foundations, general-purpose foundations, or corporate foundations. Foundations generally have very few restrictions and/or limitations, and are typically received from local entities. A list of appropriate foundations can be found at <http://foundationcenter.org>.



## **Partnerships**

To implement the recommendations contained in the comprehensive master plan, Burke County will most certainly have to expand their partnership agreements with other public agencies and private-sector organizations. There are many different types of partnerships that can be formed to achieve the goals established by the County. In fact, many local governments throughout the nation are utilizing partnerships with public and private-sector interests to accomplish community goals.

Listed below are the various types of partnerships that the County should consider in its efforts for the improvement and addition of parks and recreational facilities:

- Programming partnerships to co-sponsor events and facilities or to allow qualified outside agencies to conduct activities on properties which are municipally owned.
- Operational partnerships to share the responsibility for providing public access and use of facilities.
- Development partnerships to purchase land and/or build facilities.
- Management partnerships to maintain properties and/or facilities.

Burke County is currently participating with partnerships in other related endeavors/functions and should evaluate forming additional partnerships which



address the needs of a comprehensive park system. Direct requests should be made to potential partners, asking them to meet and to evaluate the possible benefits of partnering. This step should be made to generate interest and



*Medical centers typically partner with counties and municipalities to promote wellness programs*

agreement prior to solidifying any responsibilities for each participating party.

Private-sector partnerships can be beneficial to municipalities. Developers can use private funds to develop facilities on municipal property and lease it to the County over a long term. Over a period of time, the developer returns a portion of the revenue to the County and at the end of the lease the facility is turned over to public ownership. This type of arrangement would typically be a large capital investment for a special use facility.

## **Land Acquisition and Development**

There are many different types of land acquisition available to Burke County for park system expansion and/or future development. Due to the land costs and land availability, it is recommended that the County prioritize the property to be acquired for park facilities. Listed below are several methods for acquiring and developing parks:

### **Life Estate**

A life estate is a gift, whereby a donor retains the land during his/her lifetime and relinquishes title of the property after his/her death. In return, the owner (or family) is relieved of property tax for the given land.



## **Local Gifts**

Donations of land, money, labor and construction can have significant impact on the acquisition and development of park property. The solicitation of local gifts is highly recommended and should be organized thoroughly, with the utilization of very specific strategic methods. This often untapped source of obtaining funds requires the contacting of potential donors such as individuals, institutions, foundations, service clubs, et cetera.

## **Easement**

An easement is the most common type of 'less-than-fee' interest in land. An easement seeks to compensate the property owner for the right to use his/her land in some way or to compensate for the loss of his/her privileges to use the land. Generally, the land owner may still use the land and therefore continues to generate property tax revenue for the County.

## **Fee Simple Purchase**

Fee simple purchase is the most common method used to acquire municipal property for park facilities. Although it has the advantage of simplifying justification to the general public, fee simple purchase is the most difficult method to pursue due to limited monetary resources.

## **Fee Simple with Lease-Back or Resale**

This method allows local governments to acquire land by fee simple purchase; yet allows them to either sell or lease the property to prospective users with restrictions that will preserve the land from future development. The fee simple with lease-back or resale method of development commonly results from situations in which land owners, who have lost considerable monetary amounts in property value, determine that it is more economical to sell the land to the County (with a lease-back option) than to keep it.

## **Long-Term Option**

Long-term options allow municipalities to purchase property over a long period of time. This method is particularly useful because it enables the County to consider a particular piece of land that may have future value, though it is not currently desired or affordable at the time. There are



advantages to this method of property acquisition. The County can protect the future of the land without purchasing it upfront. Meanwhile, the purchase price of the land will not increase and the County will have the right to exercise its option. The disadvantage to the County is that all privileges relinquished by the land owner require compensation in the form of securing the option.

## 7.4 PLAN ADOPTION

The first step in implementation of the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan is adoption of the plan by Burke County. By adopting the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan, the community is able to help shape larger regional decisions so that they fit within the goals of the plan. The County also gives itself greater authority in shaping local land use decisions so that they achieve the goals and vision of this plan. In addition, the adoption of this Master Plan is essential in order to maximize available grant opportunities.



Among the opportunities available to promote the recommendations contained in the Master Plan is the ability to build upon an already committed and active base of residents, visitors and enthusiasts in the area. Through their organizations, institutions, publications and networks, Burke County can promote both the improved and new parks and greenway facilities and programs.

Second among the opportunities is the availability of the existing park facilities (amenities, programs, existing trails, et cetera.) Though some changes are being suggested in the short-term and an expanded network is suggested for the long-term, the presence of an existing network provides a strong foundation from which to build. Many County residents are already accustomed to using the existing park facilities and should become used to seeing new park amenities, programs, signage, and other improvements. Building on existing awareness is much easier than building on no awareness.

### Action Steps

Upon adoption of this plan, implementation of specific recommendations can begin. Many of these will occur simultaneously and include policy and facility improvement changes. The key steps are:



**Action Step 1:** Secure a dedicated source of revenue to address a 10-year and beyond Capital Improvement Program and address the goals of the Master Plan.

**Action Step 2:** Provide staffing necessary to support and oversee the implementation of this plan and the proper maintenance and operation of the facilities that are proposed; for example, the County may designate or hire an employee to oversee this task.



**Action Step 3:** Create Burke County Parks and Recreation Endowment Fund through the NC Community Foundation.

**Action Step 4:** Develop/implement educational and awareness programs such as public events and parks awareness by creating advocacy groups. They can be used to announce new park facilities and upcoming projects.

**Action Step 5:** Begin working on the proposed facilities that are listed in the 10-year and beyond Capital Improvement Program. These opportunities produce the framework for an initial implementation strategy:

- 1) Aggressively begin to establish potential funding mechanisms for future park expansions. This high priority goal is essential for realizing the proposed recommendations for the future growth and development of Burke County's parks and recreation facilities.
- 2) Use the nucleus of park patrons to expand the awareness of the amenities and programs of Burke County parks and recreation system.
- 3) Expand and modify the existing park system into a comprehensive, multi-use system, distributed so that it better meets the needs of the community, provides opportunities to all, and enhances the current park system.
- 4) Begin making the critical greenway connections between destination points that will allow for preservation of open space and offer an alternative mode of transportation.

These four steps represent the core of the implementation strategy. As the individual policy recommendations and physical recommendations are addressed, they should each fit with one of these four primary strategies.



**Action Step 6:** Ensure that park and greenway planning is integrated with other regional planning efforts at the state and local levels, and with long-range and current land use, economic development, parks, environmental, and community planning. The following are mechanisms to achieve this action step:

- 1) Expand local capital improvements program for yearly appropriation for greenway and park development.
- 2) Set aside money for land acquisition, construction, and maintenance of parks and greenway facilities in the annual operating budget.
- 3) Pursue and request pedestrian/bicycle projects to be added to NCDOT TIP.

*County should set aside money for construction of new facilities*

- 4) Pursue developing and expanding existing and new partnerships.
- 5) Apply for PARTF Grants and other related recreation grants for park projects and improvements.
- 6) Seek other sources of revenue funding for parks and greenway improvements, such as including local assessment districts, developer exactions, et cetera.
- 7) Pursue funding from other sources listed in this section.

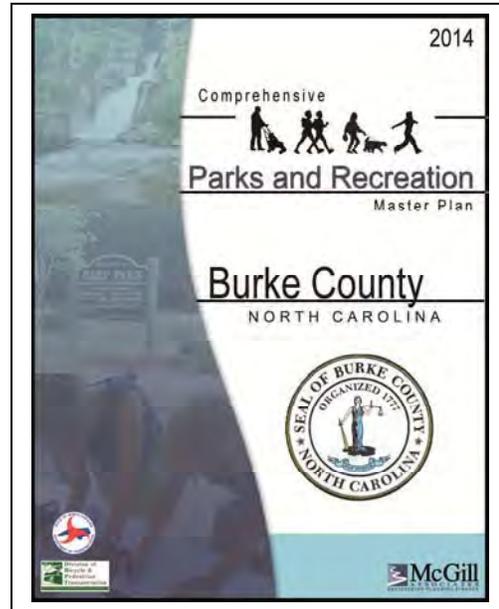


## 7.5 CONCLUSION

This Comprehensive Parks Master Plan has laid out a set of strategies for expanding and developing a safe, convenient, and usable park system as reflected in the following:

- Expansion and enhancement of existing facilities; and
- Creation of new facilities in areas of demand.

The plan has assessed the study area, analyzed the existing facilities, received community input, reviewed recreation standards, developed recommendations and provided strategies for implementing the plan. The Comprehensive Parks Master Plan is a comprehensive guide to be used in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for Burke County Parks and Recreation Department.



- END OF SECTION -

